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THINK ON THE WORD: BIBLICAL MEDITATION IN THE
LIFE OF ANDREW FULLER (1754–1815) AND THE
TRADITION IN WHICH HE STOOD

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To my wife and daughter,
Precious gifts from God

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PREFACE

In the process of writing this thesis I received tremendous encouragement and prayer support from my dear wife, Susan, and our daughter Laura, and from our church family at Grand River Community Church in Elora, Ontario, as they patiently waited for their pastor to complete this work. I received support and encouragement from ministry colleague Dr. Bob Penhearow. Dr. Steve West provided a helpful eye towards a logical argument in the first chapter, and Mark Toman assisted in ensuring the use of proper grammar in the initial chapter as well.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Devout Christians all over the world have one very precious goal in common. They desire to find delight in their worship of God. Over the centuries pious believers have used various channels to draw near to God. Among these channels is a rich tradition of literature written by Calvinistic Baptists and their Puritan predecessors. Part of that tradition involves the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.

The desire for deep satisfaction through the worship of God is a correct and proper pursuit. When asked, what is the most important commandment,

Jesus answered, ‘The foremost is, Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength’” (Mark 12:29-30 NAS).

We cannot love one we do not know, and so it is certainly right that we should desire to grow in knowledge and intimacy with God. Historically, for most evangelicals, and certainly for Baptists, this has involved hearing from God through Scripture.

New Evangelical Spirituality

Yet, in recent years some evangelicals have tried and promoted means of connecting with God, that while including Scripture, also look beyond it. There is a new popular spirituality among evangelicals that should concern those who treasure the Bible as God’s special, complete and infallible revelation. This new spirituality is a troubling cross pollination between popular spirituality and Evangelical Christianity. This spirituality is governed by the individual. It is not the church or the Bible directly that determines the constitution of this religiosity. Rather the individual

sits in supreme authority and is free to choose which aspects of spirituality suit him or her. This is not too dissimilar from those who might go to their favorite buffet restaurant and choose the delicacies that most delight their palates. Theologian Michael Horton in an article entitled “Your Personal Jesus” captures the essence of this approach to spirituality in the following quotation from *Entertainment Weekly*:

Seekers of the day are apt to peel away the tough theological stuff and pluck out the most dulcet elements of faith, coming up with a soothing sampler of Judeo-Christian imagery, Eastern meditation, self-help lingo, a vaguely conservative craving for ‘virtue,’ and a loopy New Age pursuit of ‘peace.’ This happy free-for-all, appealing to Baptists and stargazers alike, comes off more like Forest Gump’s ubiquitous ‘boxa chocolates’ than like any real system of belief. You never know what you’re going to get.¹

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Senior Research Professor David Wells has commented on this new spirituality as well and stated, “Today’s spirituality remains a deeply privatized matter whose access to reality is through pristine, uncorrupted self.”² A woman named Sheila, who follows her own inner voice has a unique name for her spirituality: “I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice.”³ Popular spirituality is intensely personal, and any form of outside analysis or critique is met with ferocious resistance. This parallels the moral axiom that is a refrain in the book of Judges, “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:16, 21:25).⁴

¹ Michael Horton, “Your Own Personal Jesus,” *Modern Reformation* 17, no. 3 (May/June 2008): 14.

² David F. Wells, “Christ in a Spiritual World,” in *Above All Earthly Powers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

³ Wells, “Christ in a Spiritual World,” 15.

⁴ Peter Jones wrote that the “*new spirituality* may well represent the next phase of the faith and practice of modern autonomous humanity.” Peter R. Jones, “The New Spirituality: Dismantling and Reconstructing Reality,” *Modern Reformation* 17, no. 3 (May/June 2008): 25.

Infiltration of this new spirituality into Evangelicalism in a way that circumvents the Bible is also evident in some of the popular recent evangelical books. The trendy novel *The Shack*, written by William Paul Young emphasizes the possibility of a private and personal encounter with God. In this piece of fiction, the main character Mack experiences the tragic death of a daughter through a violent assailant. Mack receives a letter supposedly from “God,” to meet him at “the shack,” a cabin in the woods. There Mack encounters the triune God in an immediate, physical, and visible way. Prior to this encounter with God, Mack had been to seminary, but all his encounters with God through the Bible were lackluster and cold. The triune God that Mack encounters is drastically different from the God of the Bible. God the Father is portrayed as a large black woman who gushes over Mack:

The door flew open, and he was looking directly into the face of a large, beaming African-American woman. Instinctively he jumped back, but he was too slow. With speed that belied her size, she crossed the distance between them and engulfed him in her arms, lifting him clear off his feet and spinning him around like a little child. And all the while she was shouting his name—“Mackenzie Allen Phillips”—with the same ardor of someone seeing a long-lost and deeply loved relative. She finally set him back on Earth and, with her hands on his shoulders, pushed him back as if to get a good look at him. “Mack, look at you!” she fairly exploded. “Here you are and so grown up. I have been really looking forward to seeing you face-to-face. It is so wonderful to have you here with us. My, my, my how I do love you!” And with that she wrapped herself around him again.⁵

This novel promotes a more intimate, “face-to-face” encounter with God rather than one that is meditated through the pages of Scripture.

Yet another example comes from the popular devotional book *Jesus Calling*. This book by Sarah Young has surpassed fifteen million copies sold, according to publisher Thomas Nelson.⁶ Tim Challies in an online article gave this reason for why Young wrote this devotional book:

⁵ William Paul Young, *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007), 84-85.

⁶ Tim Challies, “Ten Serious Problems with *Jesus Calling*,” *Challies* (blog), last modified November 11, 2015, <https://www.challies.com/articles/10-serious-problems-with-jesus-calling/>.

Jesus Calling only exists because Sarah Young had a deep desire to hear from God outside of the Bible. In the introduction she describes the book's genesis: "I began to wonder if I . . . could receive messages during my times of communing with God. I had been writing in prayer journals for years, but that was one-way communication: I did all the talking. I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible, but I yearned for more. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God had to say to me personally on a given day."⁷

Young practices and advocates a spiritual discipline that she calls "listening," that for her is the primary spiritual discipline of her life. Challies quotes this statement from Young:

This practice of listening to God has increased my intimacy with Him more than any other spiritual discipline, so I want to share some of the messages I have received. In many parts of the world, Christians seem to be searching for a deeper experience of Jesus' Presence and Peace. The messages that follow address that felt need.⁸

Christians are searching for a deeper experience of Jesus' presence, for an encounter with God that is rich and deep. Sadly, people like Young are promoting an encounter that happens apart from Scripture.

The Way Back

It was not always this way for many evangelicals Baptists. There is a rich history of personal piety that comes down to Christians today from Puritans and Calvinistic Baptists. When they wanted to experience a satisfying worship and deeper knowledge of God, they dug deeper into the Scriptures, rather than looking elsewhere. Christian pastors and leaders, like Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) learned to experience meaningful intimacy with God by practicing the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.

Chapter 2 is an examination of the biblical and theological foundation for the practice of biblical meditation. This is done by surveying the word forms that are

⁷ Challies, "Ten Serious Problems."

⁸ Challies, "Ten Serious Problems."

properly translated as meditate and meditation. Then several pertinent passages that address the concept of thinking deeply on the Scriptures are considered.

Chapter 3 is a survey of Puritan and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists and their practice of biblical meditation. This was the stream of Christian thought and practice that most influenced Fuller. Chapter 4 examines Fuller and his personal practice of biblical meditation as expressed in his diaries and a selection of his sermons.

Chapter 5 summarizes why it is critical that Evangelical Christians not lose touch with their valuable heritage. When believers today desire to grow in their faith and deep satisfaction and worship of God, they should look in part to their past. There they will find a clear pathway to piety that includes biblical meditation as a paramount spiritual discipline.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR THE PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL MEDITATION

Introduction

Biblical meditation is “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application and prayer.”¹ The premise of this chapter is that the practice of biblical meditation is clearly commanded and encouraged in the Old and New Testament. This will be lucidly demonstrated by examining the various occurrences of the most common Hebrew words translated as meditation: הָגָה (*haga*) and שִׁיחַ (*siah*). An examination of the lexical definitions of הָגָה (*haga*) and שִׁיחַ (*siah*) will help to further define and clarify the meaning of meditation. A survey of the occurrences of הָגָה (*haga*) and שִׁיחַ (*siah*) will demonstrate how biblical meditation is practiced and commanded in the Old Testament. An examination of the LXX equivalent to הָגָה (*haga*), μελετάω (*meletao*), further demonstrates the consistency of the meaning of the word meditate in the New Testament as well as the Old.

This chapter includes an exegesis of Old Testament passages that command and describe the method and purpose of biblical meditation. These passages include Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1, Psalm 63, Psalm 77, Psalm 119, and Psalm 143. An exegesis of Romans 12:1–2, Philippians 4:8-9, and James 1:22–25 further

¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 48.

supports the thesis that biblical meditation is commanded as a spiritual discipline in the New as well as in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Usage and Definition of הָגָה (*haga*)

The Hebrew root הָגָה (*haga*) occurs 24 times as a verb. It occurs 22 times in the common verb stem Qal and 2 times in the causative verb stem Hiphil.² The word occurs primarily in poetry, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah.³ In considering the etymology of הָגָה (*haga*) one finds that the root is used in other Semitic languages. In Aramaic the root (*hagah*) means “to think or meditate, murmur or speak.” In Syriac the noun (*heghyona*) is defined “reading, thinking, and meditating.”⁴

The basic meaning of הָגָה (*haga*) and its cognates is a low sound, characteristic of the moaning of a dove (Isa 38:14) or the growling of a lion over its prey (Isa 31:4).⁵ In Job 37:2 *haga* refers to soft thunder.⁶ The word is used to refer to “muttering” or “whispering” as in Isaiah 8:19 where it occurs in the causative form Hiphil.⁷ Another meaning of the verb is “to speak.” Examples of this occur in the Psalms where it is used in synonymous parallelism with other verbs that can be translated as to speak or in connection with the lips or tongue (Pss 37:30, 38:13). The sound of הָגָה (*haga*) comes from the palate (Prov 8:7), the throat (Ps 115:7) or the

² Johannes G. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), s.v. “*haga*.”

³ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), s.v. “*haga*.”

⁴ Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of Old Testament*, s.v. “*haga*.”

⁵ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of Old Testament*, s.v. “*haga*.”

⁶ William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978), s.v. “*haga*.”

⁷ Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of Old Testament*, s.v. “*haga*.”

tongue (Ps 35:28).⁸ It is used with reference to particular kinds of speaking, such as lament (Isa 16:7, Jer 48:31) or praise (Ps 35:28). Yet, הָגָה (*haga*) is not the normal word for speaking in the Old Testament. הָגָה (*haga*) is used at times to describe the inner longings of the human soul.⁹

The word הָגָה (*haga*) is used in 9 verses with the meaning “to reflect, to think, to meditate.”¹⁰ Specifically, this usage is in Joshua 1:8, Psalms 1:2, 2:1, 38:12 [Heb 38:13], 63:6 [Heb 63:7], 77:12 [Heb 77:13], 43:5, and Proverbs 15:28, 24:2.¹¹ It can be understood as “devise, plan,”¹² and is used in this way to describe the plots of wicked men or nations (Ps 2:1; Prov 24:2). The righteous can also “devise” or “ponder” a proper answer (Prov 15:28).¹³ When one begins to examine these usages together it becomes apparent that biblical meditation should be understood as the careful reflection of the meaning of Scripture with particular attention given to devising a plan of obedience (Josh 1:8).

When one combines this meaning “meditation” with the idea of audible sounds it is most probable that audible murmuring of the Torah is implied, especially with verses like Joshua 1:8. So הָגָה (*haga*) can be used of softly spoken recitation in connection with the study of God’s law.¹⁴ One need not assume, however, that all the audible sounds of meditation are exclusively from the recitation of the Scripture.

⁸ Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, s.v. “*haga*.”

⁹ Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of Old Testament*, s.v. “*haga*.”

¹⁰ Botterweck and Ringgren, s.v. “*haga*.”

¹¹ The square brackets around the [Heb] indicate here and throughout the thesis a different verse number in the original Hebrew text.

¹² Botterweck and Ringgren, s.v. “*haga*.”

¹³ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of Old Testament*, s.v. “*haga*.”

¹⁴ Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of Old Testament*, s.v. “*haga*.”

Properly understood הָגָה (*haga*) implies what one expresses when talking to himself.¹⁵ Biblical meditation then is the muttering of Scripture as well as muttering to oneself about Scripture. When one combines this with the usage that suggests “devise” or “plot,” one can see that the goal of the audible self-talk is to devise a plan of obedience to Scripture (Josh 1:8). In practical experience this is similar to the human experience of worrying. Often when a people worry they may mutter to themselves as they ponder the difficulties facing them and plan what actions they might take to deal with the problems. In this sense it can be argued that biblical meditation is like focused worrying about the meaning and the practical application of Scripture. While הָגָה (*haga*) is not in the imperative form, the implication of both Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2 is that meditation is an expected practice for those who are serious about understanding the will of Yahweh and putting it into practice. Biblical meditation is key when trying to avoid evil (Ps 1:1–3) and seeking spiritual blessing (Josh 1:8).

Definition and Usage of שִׁיחַ (*siah*)

Another significant word in relation to biblical meditation is שִׁיחַ (*siah*). There are 38 occurrences in the Old Testament. Verbs make up 20 of these and 18 are nouns. The predominant use is in the Psalms with 21 occurrences.¹⁶ The basic definition of this word appears to be “rehearse, repent, or go over a matter in one’s mind.” This rehearsal or meditation can take place outwardly as a verbal recitation or inwardly.¹⁷ This word is best translated as “meditation” in the Psalms, and so exegesis of those passages will be given exclusive attention. Psalm 119 is of

¹⁵ Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, s.v. “haga.”

¹⁶ Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Joseph Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. Douglas W. Scott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), s.v. “siah.”

¹⁷ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “siah.”

particular importance as there a noun form is used there to represent reverent meditation.¹⁸ As with הָגָה (*haga*), this word can be translated “to talk to oneself.”¹⁹ So, חִשָּׁב (*siah*), should be understood to be virtually synonymous with הָגָה (*haga*) and this is particularly evident through the ways in which it is used in the common practice of synonymous parallelism, which is the repeating of the thought of a second line of Hebrew poetry using different words. This will be examined further in the exegesis of the Psalms where these words occur together.

Definition and Usage of μελετάω (*meletao*) in the New Testament

The LXX equivalent of הָגָה (*haga*) is μελετάω (*meletao*). It can be understood as “to be concerned about, work, take great pains with, scheme, plan.”²⁰ It can be translated as “think about, meditate on.”²¹ It is used on 2 occasions in the New Testament. The first of these uses is in Acts 4:25 which is a quotation of Psalm 1:2 speaking of how the nations devise or plot vain things. The second use is in 1 Timothy 4:15 where the Apostle Paul uses the imperative and commands Timothy to “meditate” or “take great pains” with the tasks of reading Scripture, preaching, and teaching. The idea of this text is that Timothy must think continually about these tasks by keeping them on his mind through the act of meditating upon them.²² So it is

¹⁸ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “siah.”

¹⁹ Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, s.v. “siah.”

²⁰ Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), s.v. “meletao.”

²¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. “meletao.”

²² Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1957), 98–99.

clear that μελετάω (*meletao*), the Septuagint equivalent of הגה (*haga*), has a New Testament definition which corresponds with the Old Testament usage.

Exegesis of Joshua 1:8

Meditation is declared by the Lord to be essential for the success of Joshua, the leader who would replace Moses as the one to guide Israel (Josh 1:1–9). This first chapter of Joshua develops a series of motifs that are carried throughout the book. One of the key motifs is the theme of required covenant obedience.²³ Here in chapter 1, the means by which that obedience is brought to more exact fruition is through biblical meditation focused on the Torah.

Joshua is told to be strong and courageous as he leads the people of Israel into the Promised Land. Most of the book of Joshua is about the military conquest of the various parts of Palestine by Israel. Yet, it is telling that the word of the Lord to Joshua in chapter 1 is not military advice, but rather spiritual direction. The keys to Joshua's success were not military might, but his faithful obedience to God. This crucial element of success for Joshua is indicative in the Old Testament and is mentioned as pivotal for Israel's future kings (Deut 17:14–20).²⁴ Joshua 1:7 includes the phrase, "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you" (NIV). The words translated "be careful" and "obey" are from the Hebrew word שמר (*samar*), which means "be careful, observe," and עשה (*asah*) which means "to obey." These words are paired together 40 times in the Old Testament. Almost all of the occurrences correspond to keeping and obeying God's laws and commands.²⁵ Joshua

²³ Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 56.

²⁴ David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 85.

²⁵ Howard, *Joshua*, 85.

1:8 indicates that meditation is the necessary spiritual discipline that will enable Joshua to keep God's laws and commands.

The structure of this passage makes it clear that unless Joshua makes meditation and obedience to God's law his first priority, his leadership will fail. There are three structural elements that suggest this. First, in verse 6, the command to be strong and courageous is given, and is repeated again in verse 7. Next, there are clauses of result at the end of verses 7 and 8 that promise success in his mission. This success extends to "where you will go" and is characterized as "prosperous and successful." The last structural element that shows that meditation and the resultant obedience to God's law are vital for Joshua's life and leadership is the threefold mention of God's law in these verses.²⁶

The initial phrase of verse 8 states that Joshua should not let the Book of the Law depart from his mouth, reinforcing the concept that meditation involves continual recitation and focused thinking on God's law. He is not to simply let it leave his mouth, but is to continue to consider it and repeat it throughout the day and in the night as well. This meditation is not some sort of theoretical speculation about the law, as some of the later Pharisees engaged in, but rather a practical study of the law. The purpose of such study was to enable the readers to observe the law in their thought life as well as in action.²⁷ That Joshua is told not to allow the law to depart from his mouth, suggests that he is one who speaks God's law and therefore is a teacher of that law. His first necessary task is to understand and obey God's law, and only then is he truly qualified to teach it.²⁸

²⁶ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 73.

²⁷ Howard, *Joshua*, 86.

²⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 4, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 32.

The Hebrew verbs צלח (*tsaleh*) and שכל (*shacal*) that are translated as “prosper” and “be successful” respectively are used a number of times in the Old Testament. This is the only place that the two words are used together.²⁹ The use of almost synonymous terms in this verse emphasizes how spiritual success is related directly to obedience that is enhanced through meditation on the Torah. צלח (*tsaleh*) is used 69 times in the Old Testament, and 59 of those uses refer to prospering and succeeding in life’s endeavours and not in reference to financial or material success. In almost all of the references, the success is the result of God’s gracious and ever-present hand.³⁰ Two examples of this are Abraham’s servant who was given the task of searching for a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:21, 40, 42, 56), and Joseph’s experience in Potiphar’s house (Gen 39:2, 3, 23). The Messiah himself, even when bruised, would cause God’s will to prosper in his hand (Isa 53:10).

The word שכל (*shacal*) occurs 78 times in the Old Testament with the most common translation consisting of “have insight, understanding, be wise.”³¹ In 10 or 11 cases, including twice in this passage of Joshua 1:7-8, it takes the meaning “to be successful.”³² In most of these cases, almost without exception, success is the result of an individual seeking the Lord with zeal, or with conscientious obedience to his commandments.³³ Success is very specifically equated with the keeping of God’s law in Deuteronomy 29:9 [Heb 8], Joshua 1:7–8, 1 Kings 2:3, and 2 Kings 2:3. Therefore it is clear in Joshua 1 that the key to Joshua’s leadership and spiritual success is directly correlated with his careful attention and obedience to God’s law. The method

²⁹ Howard, *Joshua*, 90.

³⁰ Howard, *Joshua*, 88.

³¹ Howard, *Joshua*, 89.

³² Howard, *Joshua*, 89.

³³ Howard, *Joshua*, 89.

that is commanded by God as the way to stay focused on God's law so that Joshua might obey it and then teach it to others is through the process of meditation.

Exegesis of Psalm 1

Psalm 1 is positioned quite intentionally at the beginning of the collection of Psalms. It provides the entrance way to the rest of the book of Psalms. It is the first principle and sets the stage for the rest of the Psalms.³⁵ This means that the statements contained within Psalm 1 have considerable importance.

Psalm 1 is another place that *הגה* (*haga*) is used with the meaning “reflect, think, meditate.” Initially the Psalmist declares that his intent is to show the way of the blessed or happy person.³⁶ The word for blessed is plural which makes the statement more of an exclamation and intensive.³⁷ So the Psalmist is going to present the way to sheer happiness. His positive recommendation towards this happiness amounts to one thing: meditation on the Lord's Torah.³⁸ This corresponds closely to what has been previously considered in Joshua 1:8. However, the psalmist makes clear that before a person can engage in biblical meditation, it is necessary that they separate themselves from the influences of the ungodly (vv. 1–2).³⁹ The implication is that rebellion spreads like gangrene and the one who wants blessing or happiness should avoid the thoughts, lifestyle, or advice of those who are ungodly.⁴⁰ The three

³⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 60.

³⁶ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 60.

³⁷ John Easton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 62.

³⁸ Easton, *The Psalms*, 62.

³⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 4, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2.

⁴⁰ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 60.

verbs that are translated as “walking, standing, sitting” denote the postures of a person while they are awake and, as such, portray the entire course of life or conduct. It is also possible that these verbs represent stages of degradation, as this could represent an example of synthetic parallelism where the psalmist is repeating a similar idea but adding more description to it.⁴¹ So, walking might represent occasional conformity, then standing as a more fixed association, and finally sitting might represent that one is no longer simply a companion with the wicked but one who has become a member of those they associated with.⁴² The implication is that having some evil influence can lead to a habitual pattern of life that is controlled by evil and one that is not happy or blessed.

By contrast, in verse 2 the Psalmist speaks about what the truly happy person does. Here the Psalmist uses antithetical parallelism where he says contrasting things, with verse 1 representing the thesis and verse 2 the antithesis.⁴³ The happy life is not simply the avoidance of evil influences. It involves finding delight or pleasure in something entirely different. At this point one might expect that since the wicked person is identified by his associations, the godly and happy person would be described by his associations as well.⁴⁴ Certainly there is happiness found in good and godly associations, but this is not where the Psalmist says one’s delight is to be found. Rather, that delight is found in the Torah, the Law of the Lord. The Torah provides the key source of satisfaction and pleasure for the person who is truly blessed. The key to unlocking that pleasure is meditation: careful, focused thought on

⁴¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalm 1–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 16.

⁴² Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms: Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 10.

⁴³ C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 39.

⁴⁴ Boice, *Psalm 1–14*, 16.

this law. Thorough meditation takes time, and the blessed person will engage in it with joy both in the day and in the night.⁴⁵ The emphasis in this text is not meditation in and of itself. The emphasis is on the object of meditation, specifically the Torah.⁴⁶ Humanity's meaning and purpose is preserved in the Torah. The process to discover this meaning and purpose flows from continual meditation on the Torah.⁴⁷ The one who sees the Torah in this way understands it to be the intelligible expression of the will of Yahweh and as such is an unerring compass which is sufficient to regulate all his or her conduct. The Torah also acts as a strong bond which points to God's providential rule over one's life.⁴⁸ For this reason, the practice of meditating upon it is not simply becoming versed in the Torah as is still practiced by orthodox Jews today, but rather a yielding to the Torah so that it becomes second nature and "as that which fills his life as the only meaning of that life."⁴⁹

The person who meditates on the Torah day and night is likened to a tree that is transplanted by a stream of water, and because of this water source produces a perpetual abundance of fruit.⁵⁰ There is no sign of a lack of the life-giving water. The tree has leaves that never wither. Even times of drought have no effect on this tree and its production of fruit. The powerful implication for the practice of biblical meditation is clear: if one meditates day and night, they will place themselves in a position to be nourished and the result is prosperity in all that they do. The resultant

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 5.

⁴⁶ Craig G. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1999), 42.

⁴⁷ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 61.

⁴⁸ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 104.

⁴⁹ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 104.

⁵⁰ Alexander, *The Psalms*, 10.

prosperity is not affected by difficult circumstances, because the source of nourishment is always present. The statement “whatever he does prospers” interrupts the agricultural imagery and echoes Joshua 1:8.⁵¹ This echo is further demonstrated by the word translated “prosperity,” which is the same Hebrew word צלה (*tsaleh*) that is used in Joshua 1:8. So there is a consistent theme of spiritual prosperity that is promised for the one that will make biblical meditation a priority in their spiritual life. The image of the tree by the water and bearing fruit in season may well suggest another parallel with the man who meditates carefully on the word of the Torah. In some sense the tree is meant to take in water, sprout leaves and produce fruit in accordance with God’s will and purpose for it. In a similar way the blessed or godly man fulfills the purpose for which he was created when he takes in and then obeys the word of God in his outward actions.⁵²

Exegesis of Psalm 63:6 and 77:12–13

Psalm 63:6 provides an example of synonymous parallelism. This means the second line is directly related to the first and uses different words to repeat the same idea.⁵³ In the first line the Psalmist David remembers God in the watches of the night. In the second line he meditates הָגָה (*haga*) on God. While this is not a use of הָגָה (*haga*), with a specific designation of the Bible as the locus of the meditation, it is speaking about meditation or focused thought on God. What motivates David to meditate on God is the reality that David owes his preservation to the providential care that God furnishes for him.⁵⁴ So, he carefully thinks about what God has done

⁵¹ Broyles, *Psalms*, 43.

⁵² Weiser, *The Psalms*, 105.

⁵³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms*, vol. 2, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 5, 439.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, 439.

for him. Although the night was considered a dangerous time, a time when demons and evil spirits were operating, it was also considered a good time to seek God's presence in prayer and meditation.⁵⁵ So, rather than be terrified as other men during the night hours, David receives the comfort that comes through careful meditation on the character of God and His care.

In Psalm 77 the Psalmist Asaph remembers some of his troubles and is comforted and helped in verse 12 [Heb 13] as he meditates *הגה* (*haga*) on God's work and muses *שיח* (*siah*) on His deeds. This verse is another example of frequent practice in Hebrew poetry of synonymous parallelism. It appears that Asaph wants to emphasize the importance of meditation as he uses three verbs in close proximity that are almost synonymous. They are translated as "remember," used twice in verse 11 and then "meditate" *הגה* (*haga*) (v. 12a) and "muse, ponder" *שיח* (*siah*) (v. 12b).⁵⁶ The focus of this meditation is the words and deeds of the Lord. This may have involved the personal experience of the Psalmist, but is also the recollection of what the Lord had done for Israel in the past. The Psalmist records what the Lord did for Israel mentioning the specifics of Moses leading the people and the provision of passage through the sea (vv. 15–20). Considering the ways in which the Lord dealt providentially with Israel in the past is certainly an example of meditating and pondering the word of God because it is a pondering of the record of these acts in Scripture.⁵⁷ When believers are going through times of turmoil and begin to feel desperate they can read of what God has done for His people and meditate upon those

⁵⁵ James H. Waltner, *Psalms*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006), 306.

⁵⁶ Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms*, United Bible Societies Handbook (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 675.

⁵⁷ Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 139.

truths and find real comfort. So this passage is another testimony of the benefits of meditating on Scripture.

Exegesis of Psalms 119:15, 23, 48, 148; 143:5

In Psalm 119:15, the Psalmist declares that he will meditate הִשָּׂה (*siah*) on the precepts of the Lord and fix his eyes on נָבֵט (*nabet*) or regard the ways of the Lord. It is apparent that the first and second statements are very similar in meaning and so provide another example of synonymous parallelism. The verb meditate is parallel and synonymous with the verb נָבֵט (*nabet*) meaning to “pay attention to.”⁵⁸ The repetition of the statements and the verbs is for emphasis, and so the Psalmist is purposefully stressing the importance of meditating on the precepts of the Lord as an act of substantive personal piety. In the previous verse the Psalmist speaks of affection for the Word of God and declares that it is the treasure of treasures. Yet it is evident from verses 15–17 that while meditation on the Word is delightful, the purpose and learned result is the same as in Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1: obedience to that Word.⁵⁹

Psalm 119:23 is another example showing the Psalmist turning to biblical meditation in order to find comfort and help in the midst of a vexing situation. Stylistically, in this verse the Psalmist presents another example of Hebrew parallelism. This instance is antithetical, which means that the first part of the verse is contrasted with the second. The first part or thesis is “though princes sit and talk against me” and the antithesis is “your servant meditates הִשָּׂה (*siah*) on your statutes.” The Psalmist finds stability in a threatening situation. Instead of being distracted by the threatening situation of the princes talking against him, his mind is filled with the

⁵⁸ Bratcher and Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms*, 1002.

⁵⁹ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 826.

Scriptures as he meditates. However, one would be wrong to see this as some sort of escapism. Rather the truth is that the Scriptures provide the best of advice as the Psalmist states in verse 24 that the testimonies of the Lord are his counselors.⁶⁰ Once again meditation on Scripture is encouraged by this example as it provides comfort and stability in a time of challenge.

In Psalm 119:48 the Psalmist speaks of lifting his hands to the commandments of the Lord. The lifting of the hands implies worship. The Psalmist then specifically states that he loves the commands of the Lord. Then he states that he will meditate סִיח (*siah*) on them.⁶¹ The proper attitude to have as one thinks deeply on the Scripture is one of worship and adoration. The Scriptures are worthy of that respect and attention, and having this mindset will aid in meditation and the benefits that are derived from it.

In Psalm 119:148 the Psalmist declares that his eyes meet the watches of the night. This means that the Psalmist is awake throughout the night. There were three periods or watches in the night and the Psalmist had his eyes open as each one approached.⁶² The text implies a specific reason that the Psalmist stays awake. He specifically states that he is sleepless so that he might meditate סִיח (*siah*) on God's word. When most people are sleeping, the Psalmist stays awake because he has something more important to do, and that is to meditate on the Scriptures. The inference is clear; meditation on the Word of God is of more value than sleep. The Psalmist has a wholehearted commitment to the meditation of God's Word that is

⁶⁰ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1973), 422.

⁶¹ Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 425.

⁶² Bratcher and Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms*, 1039.

driving and controlling him and is keeping him awake.⁶³ The Psalmist intends to inspire his readers to be devoted to the Word of God by showing that his own devotion includes missing sleep so he might meditate on it.

In Psalm 143 David is under considerable duress as he calls out to the Lord. In this context he writes the words of verse 5 that speak about meditation. David again uses the literary technique of parallelism in this verse as he states two phrases that are synonymous. The first phrase speaks of remembering the days of old. In the next phrase he says that he meditates *הגה* (*haga*) on what the Lord has done. Then, in a synonymous parallel phrase, he states that he *muses* *שיח* (*siah*) on the works of the Lord. The use of the parallelism is, as in other cases, done for emphasis.⁶⁴ The use of *הגה* (*haga*) and *שיח* (*siah*) in this synonymous parallelism indicates that the words could be used interchangeably. David is emphasizing once more how important meditating on the works of the Lord is. David, in considering these past works of the Lord is meditating and musing on the scriptural records of the deeds of the Lord. He therefore meditates on the Scriptures in his time of distress. Scriptural meditation appears to be an excellent way for David to get his bearings in a time of turmoil. By meditating on the deeds of the Lord which are recorded in the Scriptures, David can discover the unchangeable nature of God and His redemptive attitude and temperament towards His people.⁶⁵ So, again one can see that there is specific benefit in biblical meditation and of carefully pondering the great work of God towards those who are His people.

⁶³ Grogan, *Psalms*, 198.

⁶⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 5, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 6, 253.

⁶⁵ Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 965.

Exegesis of Romans 12:1–2

In Romans 1–11 Paul expounds the glories of the gospel of grace. In chapter 12 there is shift from the declaration of precious doctrine to the application of it or from indicative to imperative.⁶⁶ This puts Romans 12:1–2 in a very significant position within Romans, just as Joshua 1 and Psalm 1 are in key locations. As with Joshua 1 and Psalm 1 this means that Romans 12:1–2 has conspicuous weight and so the believer should give this passage particular attention.

In Romans 12:1–2 Paul speaks about the renewing of the mind and so this has bearing on the subject of focused thinking, which is meditation, and more specifically on the practice of biblical meditation. In Romans 12:1 Paul describes the need for believers to offer their bodies as living sacrifices. Verse 2 is best understood as subordinate to verse 1. So, verse 2 provides the means by which people carry out the comprehensive admonition that he presents in verse 1.⁶⁷ In verse 2 Paul begins by describing what believers are not to do using two passive imperative verbs.⁶⁸ The first of these is a present imperative, preceded by a negative. The force of the tense of these verbs could be translated “stop allowing yourselves to be conformed” and “continue to let yourself be transformed.”⁶⁹ However, the first verb could be translated with a more active sense, as simply “do not conform” particularly because the verb could also be middle voice.⁷⁰ The second imperative is most definitely in the

⁶⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1996), 754.

⁶⁷ Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 754–55.

⁶⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 607.

⁶⁹ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 607.

⁷⁰ Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 755.

passive voice and should be translated “be transformed.”⁷¹ Paul’s use of the words “this world” is essentially equivalent to “the wicked.”⁷² Thematically this gives some connection with Psalm 1 where the blessed man is not influenced by the wicked, but instead meditates on God’s law. The present tense of these verbs is durative in nature and so these processes are to be viewed as going on all the time. The believer is to engage in continual renunciation and renewal.⁷³ It is the next phrase, describing the renewing of the mind which aids in this process.⁷⁴

That next phrase describes the means by which Christians are to continue to let ourselves be transformed, namely, through the renewing of our mind. The mind, νοῦς, (*nous*) is directly connected to the body and is therefore included as part of “presenting” one’s body. So, while the transformation that happens begins in the inner person, it works its way outward.⁷⁵ Paul emphasizes that for behaviour to conform to the perfect will of God and for believers to truly offer all that they are in service to God, the transformation must begin in their mind, with thought and reason.⁷⁶ Accordingly, this passage is an exemplary text that highlights how biblical meditation is a spiritual discipline which aids in spiritual growth. The renewing of the mind can further be understood as one’s “practical reason” or “moral consciousness.” Followers of Christ are to adjust their way of thinking about every aspect of their life

⁷¹ Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 755.

⁷² Charles Hodge, *Romans*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 344.

⁷³ Everett F. Harrison, *Romans*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 28.

⁷⁴ Harrison, *Romans*, 28.

⁷⁵ James G. D. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 714.

⁷⁶ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 718.

in conformity to the newness of life they have in Christ. This sort of re-programming of the mind is not a sudden event, but a lifelong process in which people's way of thinking slowly shifts to resemble more and more the manner in which God would have them think.⁷⁷

However, in chapter 7 of Romans Paul describes his struggle to live according to what he knows is right because his sin nature pulls him in a different direction. Then in chapter 8 Paul describes the work of the Spirit and specifically the mind set on the Spirit (Rom 8:1–11). From these two chapters it is clear that Paul does not mean to say that the transformation of Romans 12:2 is simply a matter of changing one's thinking, but it is something that requires the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer.⁷⁸ It is the Holy Spirit who both teaches and works into a believer's mind the commands of Christ in this process of mind renewal.⁷⁹ At the same time, Paul certainly does not mean that the believer is a passive observer. Believers have a responsible share in the process by yielding to the Holy Spirit's leading.⁸⁰ This involves resisting the pressure to adopt the customs and mindset of the prevailing culture in which one lives, while admitting that this resistance is not enough; real and lasting change must come from within.⁸¹

The transformation spoken about in Romans 12:2 also involves repentance. The fundamental solution to ungodly ethical behaviour is repentance, since repentance is, in essence, the renewing of the mind. Paul is emphasizing that the way a believer's behaviour is shifted into a new and God pleasing direction is when their

⁷⁷ Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 755.

⁷⁸ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 609.

⁷⁹ Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 758.

⁸⁰ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 609.

⁸¹ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 232.

manner of thinking is changed.⁸² So then, the renewing of the mind is the key to transformation. That renewal is the work of the Spirit, and the Spirit uses the sword that is the Word of God to carry this renewal out.⁸³ Since it is Scripture which the Spirit uses, the spiritual discipline which is uniquely fitted to support this process is biblical meditation.

The last phrase of Romans 12:2 can be translated “that you may prove what the will of God is.” The word “prove” δοκιμάζειν (*dokimazein*) is an infinitive preceded by a preposition and an article εἰς τό (*eis to*), and this grammatical combination expresses the purpose or desired result of the renewal of the mind.⁸⁴ That desired result is that one may prove what the will of God is, and that will is described as “good, pleasing and perfect.” This process of proving the will of God is not the action of testing the will of God to determine whether it is good or bad. Rather it is the process of approving the will of God by experience.⁸⁵ In this sense the one who has a renewed mind and as a result carries out the will of God, has the privilege of discovering that the will of God is approved, that it is good, pleasing and perfect. Here is a thematic connection with Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1. The causal result of the renewing of the mind is so that the believer might approve the will of God. Joshua 1:8 expresses a synonymous result of meditating on the Torah, which is practical obedience to it. Romans 12:2 states that as one practically follows the will of God, he or she discovers that it is good, pleasing and perfect. In a similar way, in Joshua 1:8

⁸² Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 436.

⁸³ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 324.

⁸⁴ Fritz Reinecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 375.

⁸⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 114–15.

and Psalm 1 meditating on the Torah results in obedience, which results in spiritual prosperity and fruitfulness. It is therefore easy to discern, that biblical meditation is a spiritual discipline which spans both the Old and New Testament, and the careful practice of this meditation results in a greater obedience to the Scriptures, leading to spiritual growth.

So then, in Romans 12:1–2 Paul lays out the sequence or pattern that God uses to continue to shape his children according to his will. It begins with believers continuing the practice of renouncing or resisting the evil influences of the society around them. Then these believers allow themselves to be transformed as their thinking is changed through the renewal of their minds. This renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit uses the instrument of the Word of God to do this task of mind renewal which leads to a practical change in behaviour.⁸⁶ That change in behaviour conforms to the will of God and believers have the delight of personally experiencing how good, pleasing and perfect the will of God is.

Exegesis of Philippians 4:8–9

In Philippians 4:8–9 the Apostle Paul gives a final exhortation to the believers in Philippi concerning what they should be focusing their thoughts upon. This text provides another New Testament expression of the importance of the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation. In this section Paul begins to conclude his letter as is evident from the use of the word “finally” *λοιπός* (*loipos*). In the original text, verses 8 and 9 form one long sentence.⁸⁷ In this conclusion Paul commands the Philippian believers “to think” *λογίζεσθε* (*logizesthe*) on a specified list of things.

⁸⁶ John MacArthur, *Romans 9–16, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 151.

⁸⁷ Walter G. Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians, Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 295.

This list is distinctive, with a “strong and effective rhetorical tone.”⁸⁸ This literary effect is accomplished by the six-fold repetition of the relative pronoun “whatever” ὅσα (*hosa*), followed by two conditional clauses. Paul achieves this strong effect through the use of these 6 clauses in synonymous parallelism and by keeping them grammatically unconnected allowing, each of the listed virtues to be presented for special consideration.⁸⁹ The last 2 clauses are intended to bolster the sweeping character of Paul’s exhortation since there is no list that would be exhaustive.⁹⁰

Some scholars have tried to create some uncertainty as to the source of the list of virtues that the Apostle Paul gives in verse 8. Some interpreters of Philippians suggest that Paul borrows this list from secular philosophers of his day.⁹¹ This is because the virtues listed are not particularly Christian and the terms are seldom used by Paul.⁹² The use of such moral lists was a writing style that was employed by moral philosophers of Paul’s day,⁹³ especially among the Stoics.⁹⁴ This evidence advances the idea that Paul may have been using a culturally relevant list, encouraging the believers in Philippi to live up to the moral excellence that they had known prior to

⁸⁸ Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 228.

⁸⁹ Peter, O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 499.

⁹⁰ Silva, *Philippians*, 228.

⁹¹ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 187.

⁹² Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 150.

⁹³ Silva, *Philippians*, 229.

⁹⁴ O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 502.

being believers.⁹⁵ However, the means in which Paul saw these virtues practiced in the believer's life was through the working of the Holy Spirit, which produces such fruit within Christians.⁹⁶ Paul speaks of citizenship in 1:27 and 3:20, and so some have suggested that the list of virtues might be an encouragement to *civic* duty. Yet, this citizenship motif is very clearly used to draw the Philippians to the reality of their Christian allegiance as their citizenship is "in heaven." When one considers the context of the letter as a whole, it is hard to consider that Paul is deliberately moving from the heights of following the example of Christ to simply being good citizens. The immediate context of verse 9 with the imperative to follow Paul's example also militates against this. Given this broader context, it is necessary to see the virtues listed in verse 8 as distinctly Christian.⁹⁷

Paul lists 6 adjectives which represent the things that are worthy of a believer's focused thinking. He follows this up with two comprehensive nouns to finalize the list. The list starts with "whatever things are *true*" ἀληθῆ (alēthē). This word is comprehensive⁹⁸ and so refers to all things that are truthful and honest. The next virtue listed is "*honorable*" σεμνά (semna). Although this word is hard to define with one term, its basic meaning is clear, "It refers to lofty things, majestic things, things that lift the mind from the cheap and tawdry to that which is noble and good and of moral worth."⁹⁹ As such, it suggests the very opposite of everything that is vulgar.¹⁰⁰ The third virtue listed is "whatever is *right* or *just*" δίκαια (dikaia). This is

⁹⁵ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 186.

⁹⁶ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 150.

⁹⁷ Silva, *Philippians*, 229.

⁹⁸ O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 503.

⁹⁹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 188.

¹⁰⁰ O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 504.

another broad term that has the idea of giving justice that is due to both God and man.¹⁰¹ The fourth virtue listed is “whatever is *pure*” ἁγνά (*hagna*). This word suggests not simply chaste, but also the idea of being suited to worship God with a purity in motives and actions (cf. 2 Cor 11:2; 1 Tim 5:22; Jas 3:17; 1 John 3:3).¹⁰² The fifth virtue is “whatever is *lovely*” προσφιλή (*prophilē*). It occurs only once in the New Testament and is again a broad term communicating the basic idea of “that which calls forth love.”¹⁰³ The sixth virtue is “whatever is of *good repute*” εὐφημία (*euphēma*). Again, the word is only used here in the New Testament. It has the idea of being “well-spoken of” or “winning, attractive” and, as such, speaks of what is kind and likely to win people over while avoiding what is likely to offend.¹⁰⁴

Paul uses two parallel conditional clauses here, “if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise” to summarize his list of ideals.¹⁰⁵ The word “excellence” ἀρετή (*aretē*) has a broad meaning in classical Greek where it describes excellence of any kind, including that of a person, animal, or thing, but Paul probably had a Stoic sense of moral excellence or goodness in mind.¹⁰⁶ The next word “praise” ἔπαινος (*epainos*) has the meaning “praise” and something “worthy of praise.” Paul uses it elsewhere to speak of the praise of God (Rom 2:29; 1 Cor 4:5), but here, when combined with the word “excellence” ἀρετή (*aretē*), it is best understood as relating to the praise of men.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 151.

¹⁰² Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 188.

¹⁰³ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 151.

¹⁰⁴ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 295.

¹⁰⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 186.

¹⁰⁷ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 186.

The main verb of verse 8 “let your mind dwell” λογίζεσθε (*logizesthe*) comes at the end of the verse. The previous 6 adjectives and 2 nouns all lead up to this imperative verb and its direct object, “let your mind dwell on these things.”¹⁰⁸ This verb λογίζεσθε (*logizesthe*) is strong, is a favourite of Paul’s with 34 of 40 New Testament occurrences being found in his epistles. The word λογίζεσθε (*logizesthe*) has a range of meanings such as “to reckon, calculate, take into account” and, as a result, “to evaluate” a person, thing, quality, or event. The definition “to ponder or let one’s mind dwell on” something is included in that range of meaning.¹⁰⁹ Since the tense of the verb λογίζεσθε (*logizesthe*) is present, Paul is calling on the Philippian believers to let their minds continually dwell on the positive qualities that he had just articulated in the 6 adjectives and 2 nouns preceding this verb.¹¹⁰ The verb λογίζεσθε (*logizesthe*) can be translated as “meditate” and this would be a very suitable translation in this context¹¹¹; however, this meditation is not an end in itself but, rather in a pattern similar to Joshua 1:8, it is intended to provoke action.¹¹² So, the purpose of such thought and evaluation is not to assess which of these qualities is good or best, but to carefully consider these traits so that their conduct will be transformed by them.¹¹³ These objects of meditation are meant to guide the Philippian

¹⁰⁸ Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 295.

¹⁰⁹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 187.

¹¹⁰ O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 507.

¹¹¹ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1903), 162.

¹¹² Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 188.

¹¹³ O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 507.

believers into good deeds.¹¹⁴ In fact, these categories of quality thoughts were meant to chart the course for their behaviour.¹¹⁵

In verse 9 Paul expands and heightens the intensity of his exhortation and he does so in three ways. First, he changes the main verb from “consider, meditate” λογίζεσθε (*logizesthe*) to “do, practice” πράσσετε (*prassetete*). Second, he emphasizes how correct behaviour has been modeled for them so that they have been able to “learn, receive, hear, and see” in Paul the manner in which they should live. Third, Paul ties his exhortation in with verse 7 and his previous promise of peace, with the words, “and the God of peace shall be with you.”¹¹⁶ So, verse 9 clearly articulates that the goal of meditating on things of good quality is for the intended result of change in behaviour, and this change will further result in God’s peaceful presence with us.¹¹⁷

It is interesting to consider the context in which Paul writes this exhortation about meditation. Chapter 1 reveals that he is in prison, chained to praetorian guards (Phil 1:13–14). The implication is that when a follower of Christ is in the direst circumstances, the way to peace comes through meditating on things that are good and profitable.¹¹⁸ This benefit of meditation is echoed in the Psalms previously considered (e.g., Pss 63:6, 77:12, 119:23, 143:5). Although Paul does not specifically mention meditating on Scripture, the adjectives that he uses to describe proper thought can certainly be found in the highest degree in the pages of holy writ. If one examines the larger context of Philippians 4 and Paul’s exhortation to “stand firm in the Lord” in verse 1, it is evident that the key to standing firm is dependent on how

¹¹⁴ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 187.

¹¹⁵ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 150.

¹¹⁶ Silva, *Philippians*, 229.

¹¹⁷ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 190.

¹¹⁸ John F. Walvoord, *Philippians: Triumph in Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 109.

one thinks (v.8), and how one acts (v.9).¹¹⁹ Therefore, Paul’s writings support biblical meditation as an essential element in maintaining a consistent Christian life, as well as assisting in the believer’s ongoing sanctification.

Exegesis of James 1:22–25

James 1:22–25 is another text that encourages the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation. In verse 22 James exhorts the believers *γίνεσθε* (*ginesthe*) “to be” doers of the word. It is possible that James intends a more charitable understanding of this present imperative verb. It can be translated “continue being” doers of the word, rather than the ingressive present “become” doers of the word.¹²⁰ Regardless, the emphasis is that the hearing of the Word must result in the doing of it.¹²¹

James uses a common literary device known as a *chiastic structure* in these verses. It is a simple chiasm where he repeats a sequence of ideas in reverse order. He begins in verse 22 with the positive command to “be doers,” in order to emphasize it. Then, near the end of the verse he states that they should not be *μόνον ἀκροαταὶ* (*monon akroatai*) “hearers only.” Then, in verse 23 James again takes up the negative example before returning to the positive one at the end of verse 25.¹²² This structure has the purpose of putting strong emphasis on the positive exhortation of being doers of the Word as contrasted with the deficiency of being only hearers. It is the positive exhortation to be doers that James wants to stand out.

James uses a parable in verses 23–24 that would be familiar to his audience. The example he uses is the practice of looking in a mirror, with the action

¹¹⁹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 185.

¹²⁰ Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1982), 96–97.

¹²¹ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 96–97.

¹²² Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 97.

of perhaps combing one's hair. The point of emphasis is not in the *manner* in which one looks, with the difference being someone "glancing" in the mirror versus "looking carefully at," since the verb κατανοέω (*katanoew*) commonly means "contemplate" or "observe carefully" (Matt 7:23; Luke 12:27, 20:3).¹²³ The purpose is to contrast the difference between the one who is "forgetting" ἐπελάθετο (*epelatheto*) the Word (v.24) and the one "remaining" παραμείνας (*parameinas*) in the Word (v. 25).¹²⁴ The main emphasis then is that the impression of the observation in the mirror is only temporary. So, while one is combing his or her hair it might be absorbing in the moment, but in most instances would bear no practical effect as one continues on with the normal business of the day. The essential point is that this action of looking in the mirror is momentary and lacking result, rather than a contrast of differing mirrors or manner of seeing.¹²⁵ The doer of the Word by contrast "remains" or "perseveres," which can mean either that he continues to "do" the Word or that he continues to "contemplate" it. In either case the one who remains in the Word is extolled for displaying in his actions the continuing influence that the Word has on his life.¹²⁶ Basic logic dictates that for the hearer of the Word to remain in the Word and be a doer of it, contemplation and meditation on the Word must take place for this hearer to synthesize what practical deeds would constitute "doing" the Word. So, in a pattern distinctly similar to Joshua 1:8, James calls on believers to not simply hear the Word, but to meditate upon it until the natural result is obedience.

¹²³ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 97.

¹²⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 83.

¹²⁵ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 98.

¹²⁶ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 83.

Another way in which James 1:22–25 resembles Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1 is in the long-term benefit that comes from meditating on the Word. In verse 25 James states that the person who hears and then eventually does the Word is a person who will be “blessed μακάριος (*makarios*) in what he does.” While this benefit of blessing can have the suggestion of immediacy, the context of chapter 1 suggests a future eschatological blessing as well. Because the verb “to be” is in a future tense ἔσται (*estai*) and the previous reference to eschatological blessing μακάριος (*markarios*) in James 1:12 suggests a future orientation to this blessing. Certainly the motif of the blessing of God on the one who hears and meditates on the Word with resulting obedience, is one that resonates in both the Old and New Testament.

Conclusion

Biblical meditation is a spiritual discipline that is of great value for the believer. In many places in the Old and New Testament it is either commanded as a practice or tacitly understood as a way of experiencing spiritual benefit and blessing. The most common Hebrew words for meditation, הָגָה (*haga*) and שִׁיחַ (*siah*), demonstrate both through definition and the variety of occurrences, that biblical meditation is the practice of repeating and pondering over a passage of Scripture. In many of these occurrences, like Joshua 1:8, the goal is to ponder over a sufficient duration and with a sufficiently intensive concentration that the result is a plan and a desire to obey. Several of the Psalms that speak of biblical meditation reveal that there are many benefits to doing so. These include comfort in frightening or challenging situations (Pss 63:6, 77:13, 119:33, 143:5), and as aid in true worship (Ps 119:48). The greatest benefit is the ongoing spiritual blessing provided by the Lord (Josh 1:8, Ps 1).

Biblical meditation is emphasized in a number of New Testament passages such as Romans 12:1–2, where it is understood to be a means to assist the believer in

avoiding conformity to this present evil world, as one is renewed in their mind. Similarly, in Philippians 4 proper thinking is commanded so that behaviour might reflect what Paul has modeled. The resultant benefit is the blessing of God's peace in a trying circumstance. Finally, in James 1:22–25, the practice of remaining in the Word until obedience is produced, is overtly commanded, and the result is again the blessing of God. Biblical meditation is a very significant spiritual discipline, because God is rationale. Jesus is described in John one as *the Word* (ὁ λόγος, *the logos*), which again describes one who is rational. It follows that the Great Commandment of loving God, includes loving Him with “all our heart, soul, *mind* διανοίας (*dianoias*) and strength” (Mark 12:30). Believers are not to empty their minds, but fill them with thoughts of God and with God's Word, which is His rational message to us.

The practice of biblical meditation is mentioned in a sufficient number of passages throughout the Old and New Testament to warrant the close attention of the believer. God is pleased and believers are blessed when they make biblical meditation a consistent spiritual discipline in their lives. It is therefore beneficial to formulate a model to do so.

CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE PURITAN AND
CALVINISTIC BAPTIST PRACTICE
OF MEDITATION

Introduction

Calvinistic Baptists of the eighteenth century are indebted to their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritan and Calvinistic (Particular) Baptist predecessors who passed on a rich heritage of biblical spirituality. The Puritans, who were abundantly literate,¹ produced a copious amount of diverse devotional literature that helped to develop an intense and personal spirituality.² The nucleus of Puritan piety, the primary discipline that was “the very life and soul of all duty,”³ was biblical meditation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an historical overview of biblical meditation as it was practiced by the Puritans and the seventeenth-century Baptists. This will be accomplished more generally through examining the background of both the Puritan and Calvinistic Baptists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and more specifically by considering some of their more prominent literature on biblical meditation.

¹ E. Glenn Hinson, “Puritan Spirituality,” in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, ed. Frank C. Senn (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 170.

² Richard C. Lovelace, “The Anatomy of Puritan Piety: English Puritan Devotional Literature,” in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers, *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, vol. 18 (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1989), 294.

³ Edward Calamy, *The Art of Biblical Meditation* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1680), 85.

Description of Puritans

The origin of the term *Puritanism* is considered by some scholars to be unclear.⁴ For the purposes of this chapter Alister McGrath provides a helpful description of Puritanism as “a version of Reformed Theology and spirituality which flourished in England and the North American colonies in the seventeenth century.”⁵ The name Puritan was first applied in the 1560s to those who did not think the Elizabethan Settlement had gone far enough in reforming the English church.⁶ For the Puritans, the English Reformation had still left the church too attached to Roman Catholic practice and belief.⁷

There was a time when the Puritans were generally viewed in a very pejorative sense. The description Puritan, in the minds of many, was a term used to describe “a kill-joy Christianity, with a glint of fanaticism, indifferent to humanity and the beauties of the world.”⁸ There has been a monumental shift away from this depiction of Puritans as “austere, hyper-rationalistic, cold and suspicious of all feeling and emotion.”⁹ In recent years more historians see Puritanism as a movement that is built on piety and “heart religion.”¹⁰

What separated the Puritans from their Reformed associates on the continent was their emphasis on the importance of experiential spirituality.¹¹ As E.

⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 95.

⁵ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 95–96.

⁶ Gordon S. Wakefield, “The Puritans,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 438.

⁷ Greg K. Daniel, “The Puritan Ladder of Meditation: An Explication of Puritan Meditation and Its Compatibility with Catholic Meditation” (MA thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993), 6.

⁸ Wakefield, “Puritans,” 438.

⁹ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 1.

¹⁰ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 1.

¹¹ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 96.

Glenn Hinson has noted, “Puritanism was spirituality. Puritans were to Protestantism what contemplatives and ascetics were to the medieval church.”¹² The heart of Puritan piety was the personal practice of the spiritual disciplines.¹³ In Puritan theological writings of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century there was a resonance that was “strongly experiential.” Theology was characterized as “the science of living well rather than as a merely intellectual discipline.”¹⁴ This form of theology emphasized the trustworthiness of both God and the Scriptures. Christ was central to every aspect of teaching. Grace and faith were foundational truths and there was a sentiment that biblical meditation was for all believers.¹⁵ The copious abundance of Puritan devotional spiritual literature was distinctive in its purview, but more extraordinary was the vigor and inwardness that characterized it.¹⁶

The locus of Puritan spirituality was principally the Word of God.¹⁷ The Puritans understood that the biblical pattern was that the Christian life should embrace all facets of life.¹⁸ This is clearly shown with regard to their industrious and high work ethic. Puritans engaged in their employment diligently not for the purpose of verifying or earning salvation, but purely to bring their vocation under God’s rule at all times.¹⁹

¹² Hinson, “Puritan Spirituality,” 165.

¹³ Wakefield, “Puritans,” 439.

¹⁴ Lovelace, “Anatomy of Purity Piety,” 299.

¹⁵ Peter Adam, *Hearing God’s Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, ed. D. A. Carson, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 210.

¹⁶ Lovelace, “Anatomy of Puritan Piety,” 306.

¹⁷ Wakefield, “Puritans,” 439.

¹⁸ Lovelace, “Anatomy of Puritan Piety,” 306.

¹⁹ Lovelace, “Anatomy of Puritan Piety,” 311.

Therefore, while it is correct to describe the Puritans in terms of a political and ecclesiastical agenda, this plainly does not go far enough.²⁰ Rather, Puritanism is “fundamentally a spirit, an attitude of mind, a spiritual outlook, a mode of life. Puritanism was of far greater consequence as a religious expression than as an institution.”²¹

Puritan View of Scripture

Puritans held to a very high view of Scripture. Puritan pastor Richard Greenham (c.1540/45–1594) called the Bible the “Librarie of the holy ghost.”²² When Greenham would quote Scripture, he would often say, “the holy Ghost here telleth us.”²³ The Puritan perception of the Bible differed from their contemporary Quakers who joined them in the desire to see further reform come to the church of England. The Quakers were in opposition to the Puritans because the Puritans were “people of a book, the Bible.”²⁴ The Puritans held the conviction that God spoke through the pages of Scripture rather than by a direct means, as the Quakers believed. The Quakers did not concur with the conviction that the Spirit’s words were the Bible and only the Bible.²⁵ For Puritans, the origin of piety was built on doctrine and the authority of Scripture, rather than laying those aside.²⁶ So, the natural outflow of this

²⁰ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 6.

²¹ Brian G. Armstrong, “Puritan Spirituality: The Tension of Bible and Experience,” in *The Spirituality of Western Christendom II: The Roots of the Modern Christian Tradition*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute and Institute of Cistercian Studies, 1984), 238.

²² John H. Primus, *Richard Greenham: The Portrait of an Elizabethan Pastor* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 86–87.

²³ Primus, *Richard Greenham*, 86–87.

²⁴ Adam, *Hearing God’s Words*, 179.

²⁵ Adam, *Hearing God’s Words*, 180.

²⁶ Lovelace, “Anatomy of Puritan Piety,” 301–2.

conviction concerning Scripture was the further conviction that every pious Puritan was expected to regularly read and hear the word of God.²⁷ As Richard Lovelace has noted concerning Puritan piety, “Of the Scripture as a means of grace, little needs to be said; this is so foundational as to be taken for granted.”²⁸

The Puritans did not view Scripture simply as something to be understood like a textbook. The Bible provides something more than rigid information. For the Puritan, Scripture was a primary means by which God transmits His grace to us.²⁹ Scripture is the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit uses to bring about our union with Christ.³⁰ Puritans cherished a biblical spirituality which they sought to “assiduously emulate and to realize in their own lives.”³¹ Puritans strongly held the conviction that the Scriptures covered all aspects of life. The Scriptures “in precepts, principles, and examples provide objective guidance for the godly walk in every area of life.”³² George Swinnock (1627–1673), a Puritan pastor who was well respected as a “skillful physician of the soul,”³³ held to a resolute conviction concerning the efficacy of Scripture.³⁴

For the Puritans, the Scriptures were not only the final authority for faith and practice, but the primary means of grace and the guide that covered the whole

²⁷ Lovelace, “Anatomy of Puritan Piety,” 315.

²⁸ Lovelace, “Anatomy of Puritan Piety,” 315.

²⁹ J. Stephen Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word: Scripture Meditation in the Piety of George Swinnock,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 53–54.

³⁰ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 54.

³¹ Hinson, “Puritan Spirituality,” 178.

³² Lovelace, “Anatomy of Puritan Piety,” 308.

³³ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 35.

³⁴ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 53.

expanse of life. All that was necessary for a life of godliness was readily accessible through the careful reading of Scripture. Puritan pastor and theologian John Owen (1615–1683) wrote the following concerning the authority and the origin of the Bible:

Scripture is from God, and he speaks in it and by it. The work of the Spirit is found in the Scriptures: The Spirit never speaks to us *of* the Word, but *by* the Word and through it.³⁵

It is Scripture then that was the cornerstone and foundation for every facet of Puritan spirituality. Therefore, a very important spiritual discipline for the Puritans involved understanding and applying Scripture to all of life and the means to accomplish this was through meditation.

Puritan Family Piety

Puritans also affirmed the family as the basic unit of society. This is not surprising since the authority of the clergy was diminished through the Reformation in the sixteenth century. This left a void that elevated the task of heads of households.³⁶ Puritans especially highlighted the piety of the family. It was the parents' responsibility to instruct their children in the faith and especially in biblical truth.³⁷ So, while private devotion lay at the heart of Puritan piety, "family exercises" in believers' homes was one of the crucial means to carry them out both in Britain and among Puritans in America.³⁸ The fact that Puritan spirituality was largely focused on the family has made some suggest that there is warrant in comparing the Catholic monastery to the Puritan family. Fathers served as the spiritual leaders acting

³⁵ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 195.

³⁶ Adam, *Hearing God's Words*, 167.

³⁷ Adam, *Hearing God's Words*, 167.

³⁸ Charles Hambrick-Stowe, "Puritan Spirituality in America," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers, *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, vol. 18 (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1989), 346.

like “priests,” although mothers and other adults did share in the burden for leading family worship. There were forms of catechisms written by Puritan pastors and these were used for instruction. Included in family worship was the singing of Psalms, devotional reading of the Bible, and sometimes other material like devotional manuals or published sermons and prayer. These family spiritual exercises took place morning and evening and were often centered around mealtimes. Family worship was considered so pivotal to spiritual progress that pastors would try and regularly visit to observe the development of the family devotions while offering guidance on how to improve family worship.³⁹ The principal exercises in private spiritual devotion for adults were reading of Scripture, meditation, and prayer. Puritan adults guided their children to participate in these spiritual disciplines as well.⁴⁰ It would be difficult to overestimate the value of this family-centered piety as a catalyst to dispensing Puritan spirituality and the primary spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.

Puritan Exhortations to Meditation

As people of the Book, all Puritans were expected to read the Scriptures. It would be more accurate to say they were to “pray and pour” over the Scriptures, eager to understand God’s message for them.⁴¹ Both in Britain and in America, Puritans included three major activities in their private spiritual exercises: reading,

³⁹ Hambrick-Stowe, “Puritan Spirituality in America,” 347.

⁴⁰ Hambrick-Stowe, “Puritan Spirituality in America,” 348.

⁴¹ Hinson, “Puritan Spirituality,” 170.

meditation, and prayer.⁴² Since Puritan piety was principally the Word, meditation on the Word was a common theme⁴³ and central to Puritan spirituality.⁴⁴

Lewis Bayly, (d. 1631) a bishop of Banger in the church of England and a devotional writer,⁴⁵ wrote the popular devotional book *The Practice of Piety*, a manual for spirituality. In this work Bayly guided the devout believer to read a chapter of Scripture morning, noon, and night so that the entire Bible might be read in a year. After reading the chapter he gave the exhortation to meditate on

its exhortations and counsels to good works and a holy life, threatenings of judgment for sins, blessings, God's promises for Christian virtues (patience, chastity, mercy, almsgiving, zeal in his service, charity, faith and trust in God), and God's gracious deliverance and special blessings.⁴⁶

Bayly insisted that the Scriptures not be read as history but rather “as letters sent directly from God.” They should therefore be read with reverence, “as if God stood by and spoke the words directly to the readers, thus inciting to virtue and repentance of sin.”⁴⁷

The devotional pattern for a Puritan during a weekday was to begin by rising early, followed by meditation that focused on the mercy of God that had permitted one to survive the night, and then meditation on God's attributes in contrast to one's sin. Morning meditations focused not only on the events of the morning but were focused on Scripture as well.⁴⁸ A little later would come morning prayer, either

⁴² Hambrick-Stowe, “Puritan Spirituality in America,” 348.

⁴³ Adam, *Hearing God's Words*, 167.

⁴⁴ Wakefield, “Puritans,” 443.

⁴⁵ Thomas Richards, “Bayly, Lewis (died 1631), bishop and devotional writer,” *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, 1959, <https://biography.wales/article/s-BAYL-LEW-1575>.

⁴⁶ Hinson, “Puritan Spirituality,” 170.

⁴⁷ Hinson, “Puritan Spirituality,” 170.

⁴⁸ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 41.

with the family or alone. The rest of the day was spent in the calling of employment. On returning home, there would be prayer around the evening meal, then family worship with careful spiritual instruction. Before sleep, the devout Puritan would continue to meditate on God's Word.⁴⁹ Puritans were diligent to heed the example and exhortation of Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1 to meditate on the Scriptures day and night.

Edmund Calamy (c. 1600–1666), an English Presbyterian church leader, wrote a manual to guide believers in biblical meditation entitled *The Art of Biblical Meditation*. In this work Calamy exhorted believers of every age, gender, and station in life to engage in biblical meditation:

God requires this of you *young gentlemen*, and therefore . . . you read of Isaac, that he went out to meditate. . . . This is a duty that God requires of *Kings, of Nobles, and of great persons*; and therefore *David*, though he was a King, and had a great deal of work and business, yet he saith of himself, *Psal. 119.15. I will meditate in thy precepts. v. 23* This is a duty that God requires at the hands of *Soldiers, and Generals, and Captains, Josh. 1.8*. . . . It is a duty that God requires of all *Learned men*, and of all that are *Scholars, 1 Tim 4.15*. . . . This is a duty that God requires of *Women*; and therefore it is said of *Mary, Luk. 2.19. She kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart. v. 51. But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart*. That is, she meditated upon them.⁵⁰

For Calamy, and other Puritans like him, biblical meditation was not an optional practice that a Christian might engage in if they could find the time. Their conviction was that biblical meditation was a necessary spiritual discipline, and it would not be an overstatement to say that the Puritans were convinced it was the cardinal spiritual discipline above all others. At the conclusion of *The Art of Divine Meditation*, Calamy reminded his readers of the singular importance of biblical meditation:

This duty is not only a duty, but the *quintessence and marrow of all other duties*; there is no duty will take impression upon your souls without the practice of this duty; it is the very life and soul of Christianity, without which a Christian is but the

⁴⁹ Lovelace, "Anatomy of Puritan Piety," 308.

⁵⁰ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 4–5.

carcass of a Christian. . . . O let me intreat you that you would take some spare time every day, to go up to the Mount of God, to meditate.⁵¹

Calamy spoke of diminutive spiritual growth in believers, of a spiritual dryness, distance, and frigidity towards God. This stunted spiritual growth was no mystery. The answer was abundantly clear. The believer who is spiritually sick has not been diligent in the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation:

Let me tell you, you would be tall Christians in grace if you did accustom your selves to this duty; the reason why you are such Dwarfs in Christianity, and so unacquainted with God, and the Promises, and Christ, and Heaven, is for the want of the practice of this duty; this is the reason why you creep upon the ground, and are so poor in Grace, and so lean in Religion.⁵²

Seventeenth-century Puritan pastor Richard Baxter (1615–1691) wrote about biblical meditation and the supreme need of the devout to regularly engage in it. He stated that not only was it the chief duty of believers to engage in regular biblical meditation, but that they should be watching and directing their brothers and sisters in Christ to actively participate as well. He wrote concerning the need to exhort others to participate in biblical meditation: “Every good Christian is a teacher, and has a charge for his neighbor’s soul.”⁵³

Biblical meditation was a spiritual discipline that Puritans wrote about often in their massive collection of devotional writings. It was understood that all should participate in biblical meditation and that great spiritual benefits could be anticipated for those who engaged in it. Calamy wrote of the glorious benefit of having access to the wonder and majesty of who the Lord God is, which increases the believer’s love for him:

Divine meditation is a mighty help to beget us a love to God; for as it is with a picture, that hath a curtain drawn over it, though the picture be never so beautiful,

⁵¹ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 205.

⁵² Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 206.

⁵³ Richard Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, in *Practical Works of Richard Baxter in 4 Volumes*, vol. 3 (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 60.

you cannot see the beauty of it till the curtain be drawn aside; to an unconsidering, an unmeditating Christian, God is as a picture with a curtain drawn of it, he cannot see the beauty of God, but meditation draws the curtain, and lets us in to behold all the beauty that is in God; and he that beholds the beauty of God, cannot but love God.⁵⁴

Description of Puritan Meditation

The Puritans used a variety of analogies to describe meditation. Baxter provided great assistance in his effort to articulate how gratifying biblical meditation is.⁵⁵ His primary work on meditation, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, made a unique contribution to the practice of biblical meditation since the subject of focus had often been neglected. That subject was the return of Christ and the heavenly bliss to come.⁵⁶ Baxter used the analogy of digestion to describe the process of biblical meditation: "As digestion is the turning of raw food in chyle and blood, and spirits and flesh, so meditation, rightly managed, turneth the truths received and remembered, into warm affection, raised resolution, and holy and upright conversation."⁵⁷

This analogy of likening meditation to the stomach's digestion is common in other Puritan meditation literature. Similar analogies are the pressing of grapes in the winepress, digging gold from mines, cows chewing of the cud, and sucking the sweetness from flowers.⁵⁸

George Swinnock (1627–1673) was a seventeenth-century Puritan who, like many of his contemporaries, wrote about biblical meditation. Swinnock was born in Maidstone, Kent. He graduated with a B.A. from Cambridge University (1647) and an M.A. from Oxford University (1650). He served for a number of years in the

⁵⁴ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 44–45.

⁵⁵ Daniel, "Puritan Ladder of Meditation," 32.

⁵⁶ Daniel, "Puritan Ladder of Meditation," 32.

⁵⁷ Baxter, *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, in *Practical Works*, 296.

⁵⁸ Daniel, "Puritan Ladder of Meditation," 32.

Church of England before being expelled and then he served as a chaplain for a wealthy family. When religious restrictions were loosened he returned to Maidstone to become the pastor of the local church before his death one year later.⁵⁹

Swinnock described biblical meditation by employing the comparison of fire and water. The problem is that human hearts in their sinful condition are cold. It is the process of meditation that causes heat and makes them “boil with love” for God and His word.⁶⁰ The catalyst to move the truths of Scripture from the head to the heart is biblical meditation. Swinnock put it this way: “The spring of this knowledge may be in the head, and its rise in the understanding; but it slideth down into the heart, breaketh out into the life, and so floweth along in the channel of grace and holiness, till at last it lose itself in the ocean of glory.”⁶¹

Swinnock’s understanding corresponds with that of his contemporaries in the larger Puritan meditative tradition. A crucial aspect of the tradition was the perception of a tripartite nature of the human soul. Puritans divided the human soul into three main faculties: the understanding or reason, the affections, and human volition.⁶² Swinnock articulates this as “the understanding to conceive, the will to choose, the affections to love and desire.”⁶³ In close association with other Puritans, Swinnock held the conviction that meditation is initiated in the understanding, expands to the affections, and culminates in the will.⁶⁴ Calamy adhered to the same

⁵⁹ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 36.

⁶⁰ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 36.

⁶¹ George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 1:373.

⁶² Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 37.

⁶³ George Swinnock, *The Christian Man’s Calling*, in *Works*, 2:194.

⁶⁴ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 38.

understanding of the trichotomic nature of the soul. In meditation he could say that he must get through three doors: “the understanding . . . the door of the heart and affections” and “the door of conversation . . . to live according to the life of Christ . . . to obey the commands of God.”⁶⁶ These correspond to the mind, the affections, and the will.

In his perception of biblical meditation, Swinnock followed a Puritan tradition that dated back to Joseph Hall (1574–1656), who was Bishop of Norwich. Hall wrote a much-used manual on meditation, *The Art of Divine Meditation*. For Hall, the process of meditation had to begin with intellect. Since the Bible is objectively true, it is imperative to understand the correct interpretation and meaning before one would use their imagination and senses to master a text.⁶⁷ Hall provided this description of biblical meditation: “It begins in the understanding, endeth in the affection; it begins in the brain, descends to the heart; begins on earth, ascends to heaven, not suddenly but by certain stairs and degrees till we come to the highest.”⁶⁸ Hall did not assert that meditation stopped with the mind, however. He stated, “In meditation we both see and taste; but we see before we taste: sight is of the understanding; taste, of the affection: neither can we see, but we must taste; we cannot know aright, but we must needs be affected.”⁶⁹

The Puritans practiced a form of biblical meditation that engaged the whole person. They recognized that humans are more than just intellect, that they have strong desires and emotions as well as volition. Effective biblical meditation acted as a catalyst to produce what Puritans understood was the will of Almighty God. It involved more

⁶⁶ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 105–6.

⁶⁷ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 40.

⁶⁸ Joseph Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, in *Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall, D. D.*, ed. Philip Wynter (Oxford: Oxford University, 1872), 6:61.

⁶⁹ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:72–73.

than the intellect, but did not exclude it. Believers' minds must be engaged first and then their affections can be turned to the desires God wants for them, which can further result in the will to take on a course of action that pleases God. So, Swinnock defined biblical meditation as follows: "A serious applying the mind to some sacred subject, till the affections be warmed and quickened, and the resolution heightened and strengthened thereby, against what is evil, and for that which is good."⁷⁰

Puritan Methodology of Biblical Meditation

Puritans developed and perfected mechanisms of meditation and contemplation appurtenant to their heart religion.⁷¹ There were several recommended steps to prepare oneself and to get in the right heart attitude and spirit for proper meditation. Following the preparation there were three stages involved in biblical meditation. There was "consideration," the rational control of the whole process of meditation.⁷² This is what Swinnock describes in his definition above "as a serious applying the mind to some sacred subject."⁷³ The second stage was engaging the affections or emotions. This was accomplished largely through soliloquy. Puritans like Baxter understood this to be preaching to oneself, self-talk, or self-exhortation.⁷⁴ In Swinnock's definition this is what he means by the phrase "till the affections be warmed and quickened."⁷⁵ The last part is addressing the will, by telling oneself how

⁷⁰ Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, 425.

⁷¹ Hinson, "Puritan Spirituality," 172.

⁷² Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, in *Doubleday Devotional Classics*, ed. E. Glenn Henson (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1978), 143.

⁷³ Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, 425.

⁷⁴ Adam, *Hearing God's Words*, 203.

⁷⁵ Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, 425.

good it is to pursue and love God and how terrible it is to follow after sin.⁷⁶ This is what Swinnock has in mind in his definition when he says that the end effect of biblical meditation is “the resolution heightened and strengthened thereby, against what is evil, and for that which is good.”⁷⁷ This last stage involves prayer which includes praise and thanksgiving, but also lament and confession.⁷⁸ This step of prayer often involved pleading with God for the resolution and determination to respond in obedience to the truths that had just stirred the mind and heart of the one engaged in meditation. Essentially, in meditation, the Puritan wanted to move the text or object of meditation from the starting point of the mind down to the heart.⁷⁹

Baxter, like other Puritans, insisted that meditation happen at stated times to avoid omission, frequently to prevent shyness between God and the soul and prevent unskillfulness and “loss of heat and life.”⁸⁰ Baxter writes concerning biblical meditation: “Give it stated time. Stated time is a head to duty. Frequency will habituate the heart to the work and make it more easy and delightful.”⁸¹ Joseph Hall insisted, “Set thine hours and keep them, and yield not to an easy distraction.”⁸² Hall was not dogmatic about a specific time. He wrote, “It shall be enough, that, first, we set ourselves a time; secondly, that we set apart that time wherein we are aptest for this service.”⁸³ One chief reason why Puritans suggested frequent biblical meditation was the recognition that it would result in

⁷⁶ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 50.

⁷⁷ Swinnock, *The Christian Man’s Calling*, 425.

⁷⁸ Adam, *Hearing God’s Words*, 203.

⁷⁹ Hambrick-Stowe, “Puritan Spirituality in America,” 348.

⁸⁰ Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, in *Doubleday Classics*, 130–38.

⁸¹ Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 92.

⁸² Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:52.

⁸³ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:52.

increased ease of meditation. Practice improves one's ability to meditate. Thus, Edmund Calamy stated, "It is a hard matter to keep the heart close in Meditation of Divine things; and therefore you must accustom your selves to this duty, and use will make perfectness, . . . by often doing it, at last through grace it will become easie."⁸⁴

Frequency also assists in sustaining the heat of devotion.⁸⁵ Calamy exhorted Christians to daily meditation to increase intimacy with God when he said:

The oftner we meditate of God and Christ, *the more near and intimate acquaintance we shall have with them*; as you know Neighbors, the oftner they visit one another, the more acquainted they come one with another; and the seldomer they visit one another, the more estranged they are one to another. Visitation breeds acquaintance; so the seldomer you think of God and Christ, the more you are estranged from them, and the less acquaintance you have with them; and the oftner you meditate of God, the more intimate society you will have with him.⁸⁶

Calamy gave another reason for the need of daily biblical meditation: "We are every day assaulted with the Devil, therefore we should every day put on the armour of Divine Meditation."⁸⁷

Puritans set aside specific times for meditation.⁸⁸ Their practice was daily and usually divided into both morning and evening periods.⁸⁹ Morning was advised as an optimum time for biblical meditation. In *The Practice of Piety*, Bayly made this comment concerning the morning: "But if thy heart be not (at thy first waking) filled with some meditations of God and his Word; . . . Satan will attempt to fill it with worldly cares, or fleshly desires, so that it will grow unfit for the service of God all the day after."⁹⁰ Hall

⁸⁴ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 99.

⁸⁵ Daniel, "Puritan Ladder of Meditation," 40.

⁸⁶ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 99.

⁸⁷ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 82.

⁸⁸ Daniel, "Puritan Ladder of Meditation," 40.

⁸⁹ Daniel, "Puritan Ladder of Meditation," 40.

⁹⁰ Louis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety* (London: D. Midwinter, 1716), 124.

recommended the morning as well, as he counselled: “The golden hours of the morning some find fittest for meditation; when the body, newly raised, is well calmed with his late rest; and the soul hath not as yet had from these outward things any motives of alienation.”⁹¹

Preparation for biblical meditation also involved finding solitude. Swinnock exhorted the one preparing to meditate to “retire out of the worlds company, to converse with the word of God.”⁹² Hall encouraged the same when he said, “Solitariness of place is fittest for meditation. Retire thyself from others if thou wouldest talk profitably with thyself. So Jesus meditates alone in the mount; Isaac in the fields; John Baptist in the desert; David on his bed.”⁹³ Edmund Calamy spoke of location when he mentioned Isaac going into the fields to meditate. Calamy commented, “I do not think that this example is obligatory, that a man is always bound to go into the *fields* to meditate. . . . But this example doth hold out thus much to us, that private and solitary places are the fittest places for meditation.”⁹⁴

After finding a private location, the believer sought to focus their thoughts and heart on God and prayed for God’s blessing in meditation. Next came the offering and renewal of repentance.⁹⁵ Hall described it in this way:

The soul must therefore be purged ere it can profitably meditate. . . . The cloth that is white, which is wont to be the colour of innocency, is capable of any dye; the black, of none other. Not that we require an absolute perfection; which, as it is incident unto none, so if it were, would exclude all need and use of meditation; but rather an honest sincerity of the heart, not willingly sinning, willingly repenting

⁹¹ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:56.

⁹² Swinnock, *The Christian Man’s Calling*, 2:429.

⁹³ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:55.

⁹⁴ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 76.

⁹⁵ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 43.

when we have sinned.⁹⁶

The last phase of preparing for meditation was to lay aside earthly thoughts that could cause distraction.⁹⁷ Hall gave the following explanation:

Neither may the soul that hopeth to profit by meditation suffer itself for the time entangled with the world, which is all one as to come to God's flaming bush on the hill of visions with our shoes on our feet. Thou seest the bird whose feathers are limed unable to take her former flight; so are we, when our thoughts are dinged together by the world, to soar up to our heaven in meditation.⁹⁸

Baxter, in speaking of preparation for meditation, stated, “[It] requires preparation of the heart by freeing it of the world—business, troubles, joys—and by attaining the greatest solemnity of heart and mind through the apprehension of the presence of God and his incomprehensible greatness.”⁹⁹

After careful preparation the believer begins the real process of biblical meditation. Meditation proper begins with the intellect. Here believers use their understanding to derive the meaning of the Scripture text. Using the trinary division of the human processing of truth, Puritans understood that meditation begins in the head and must do so, before descending to the heart where the desires and will were located. Baxter says that this initial stage “makes reason strong and active” and “exalts reason to its just authority.” This is necessary because it is reason which “opens the door between the head and the heart.”¹⁰⁰ Puritans, like Swinnock, were unequivocally committed to a grammatical-historical study of the Scriptures. Since the Word of God was objective truth, it could not be read in a subjective manner. It

⁹⁶ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:51.

⁹⁷ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 43.

⁹⁸ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:51.

⁹⁹ Baxter, *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, in *Doubleday Classics*, 143.

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, in *Doubleday Classics*, 143.

was necessary to carefully consider the historical context and grammatical structure to determine the accurate meaning of a text.

To assist in actively understanding the text Swinnock advocated asking questions of the text with one's mind, such as what are the "causes, properties, effects, titles, comparisons, testimonies and contraries."¹⁰¹ One example from Swinnock relates to the subject of meditating on the "excellency of holiness." He suggested first that a believer "meditate its nature (its conformity to God), causes (its principal is the Spirit and its instrumental is Scripture), names (it is the image of God, the divine nature, and the kingdom of heaven), and effects (it results in pardon, peace, joy, adoption, growth, and perseverance)."¹⁰²

Calamy used a similar methodology when he considered the subject of the "sinfulness of sin." He posed a series of questions to the Scriptures and himself, "that I might enlarge my intellectual part of consideration."¹⁰³ Calamy stated,

The *description of sin*, and I will say thus to my soul, when I am alone: Oh my soul! why shouldst thou not hate and abhor sin? is not sin the breach of the holy law of God? and doth it not therefore deserve eternal damnation? is not sin a walking contrary unto God? and certainly that man that walks contrary to God, walks contrary to Heaven, and contrary to his own happiness. Is not sin most opposite to the greatest good, and therefore must needs be the greatest evil? and why then should not sin have the greatest sorrow? why should not I hate sin above all things, if it be the greatest evil?¹⁰⁴

The next question related to the extent or distribution of sin. In other words, to what degree has sin affected him personally. Calamy wrote,

Thus I would say to my soul: Oh my soul! how art thou be-leper'd with sin! how art thou all over bespread with iniquity! thou art guilty of the first sin that ever was committed in the world, of *Adam's* eating the forbidden fruit; that sin was justly mine by imputation . . . thou wert conceived in sin, and thou art born in iniquity;

¹⁰¹ Yuille, "Conversing with God's Word," 40.

¹⁰² Yuille, "Conversing with God's Word," 42.

¹⁰³ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 178.

¹⁰⁴ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 178.

thou hast a nature which thou carriest about with thee, which makes thee prone to all sin, and indisposed to all good; thou hast a nature that defiles all thy holy duties, and thou art guilty of many actual transgressions, of heart-sins, of lip-sins, of sins of omission; how many good duties have I omitted! of sins of commission, how many evil actions have I committed!¹⁰⁵

Calamy examined the subject of sin further by asking about the origin of sin. What is the cause of sin? He wrote,

I would consider the original and cause of sin; and I would say thus: Oh my soul! surely God is not the author of all these sins that I am guilty of; it is the greatest blasphemy in the world to charge God with our sins; God cannot be the author of that of which he is the punisher. . . . Oh! it is my wicked heart that is the root of all my sin; it is not the *Devil* that is the original of all my sin, for the *Devil* cannot force me to sin; the *Devil* perswades me to sin, tempts me to sin, but he cannot compel me to sin.¹⁰⁶

To expand his study more Calamy next asked what are the results of sin? What fruit does it produce and what are the effects of sin? He wrote,

Oh my soul! be thou humbled for thy sins; Oh lye in the dust because of thy sins; for it is sin that is the cause of all evil, both *Temporal, Spiritual and Eternal*; sin brings temporal, spiritual, and eternal *curses* . . . it was sin that turned Heaven into Hell, and made God rain down fire and brimstone upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*; it is sin that kindles the *fire* in Hell; the fire in Hell would go out were it not for *sin*...¹⁰⁷

Calamy, like other Puritans, used contrast as a tool to comprehension. Concerning sin he stated,

What is the opposite of sin? why Grace; Then I would meditate of the excellency of Grace; and I would say, Oh my soul! how beautiful is that soul that is endued with Grace! sin makes me like a Devil, sin stamps the Devils image upon my soul, but Grace makes me Gods picture; Grace is the portraiture of the Holy Ghost.¹⁰⁸

Hall included contrast as one of the tools to examine a biblical text. He stated, when considering a truth from Scripture, he “first, shall meditate of that which is diverse from it, or contrary unto it.”¹⁰⁹ Hall would take the truth and use comparison, asking with what

¹⁰⁵ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 178–79.

¹⁰⁶ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 179–80.

¹⁰⁷ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 180.

¹⁰⁸ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 182.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:67.

does this compare? He wrote, “The mind shall make comparison of the matter meditated with what may nearest resemble it, and shall illustrate it with fittest similitudes, which give no small light to the understanding, nor less force to the affection.”¹¹⁰ The asking of these variety of questions was used to help unpack the meaning of a text. This bombardment of questions from every conceivable angle and viewpoint helped the Puritan to think carefully about the text of Scripture that they were engaged with. For the Puritan this process should not be rushed. “If we remove the pot of water from the fire before it boils, it will quickly cool. Similarly, if we leave off meditation before the affections are fully engaged, our enthusiasm will quickly wane.”¹¹¹

After examining the passage thoroughly with the intellect, the next stage in meditation was to ignite the affections. The consistent method that Puritans engaged in was soliloquy. Soliloquy was a rhetorical device where the person meditating would dialogue with their own soul.¹¹² Baxter stated the following about the importance of soliloquy:

By soliloquy, or a pleading the case with thyself, thou must in meditation quicken thy own heart. Enter into serious debate with it. Plead with it in the most moving and affecting language, and urge it with the most powerful and weighty arguments. . . . Do this in thy heavenly contemplation; explain to thyself the things on which thou does meditate; confirm thy faith in them by Scripture; and then apply them to thy self.¹¹³

In a similar vein Swinnock describes a series of questions and answers which are designed to help us “commune” and conference with our “hearts.” He described it thus:

If thou wouldst walk closely with God, and keep even with him, reckon daily with him, call thyself to a strict scrutiny: What do I? How live I? Where am I? Is the

¹¹⁰ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:69.

¹¹¹ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 47.

¹¹² Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 46.

¹¹³ Baxter, *Practical Works*, 102.

work I do warrantable by the word or no? Is my life the life of faith, of holiness, or no? Am I in God's way, under his protection, or no? Have I truth of grace, the power of godliness, or do I please myself with the form of it? Do I thrive and increase in grace, or do I decay and decline? Suppose I were to die this night, what ground have I to hope for heaven? What assurance that I shall escape the power and rage of frightful devils? What evidences have I that I am a new creature, engrafted into Christ, and thereby entitled to life and bliss? Thus feel the pulse of thy soul, inquire into its state, visit it often, and see how it doth.¹¹⁴

Soliloquy was never a solitary practice for the Puritan. It was always to be combined with prayer. Baxter put it this way:

Thus in our meditations, to intermix soliloquy and prayer; sometimes speaking to our own hearts, and sometimes to God, is, I apprehend, the highest step we can advance in this heavenly work. The mixture of them, like music, will be more engaging.¹¹⁵

In addressing the combination of prayer with soliloquy and meditation, Hall wrote, "Prayer therefore and meditation are as those famous twins in the story, or as two loving turtles, whereof separate one, the other languisheth: prayer maketh way for meditation; meditation giveth matter, strength, and life to our prayers."¹¹⁶ Edmund Calamy declares the necessity of combining prayer with meditation, as he maintained, "Prayer will do you no good unless it be joined with meditation, . . . Prayer without Meditation is dry, and lukewarm, and cold; and the reason why our prayers are like so many *dead carcasses of prayers*, is because we do not join *meditation* with *prayer*."¹¹⁷ This practice of preaching to oneself that the Puritans engaged as a tool to ignite their desires for God follows the example of King David who addressed his own soul in Psalm 42. "Why art thou cast downe, my soule, and vnquiet within me? waite on God: for I will yet giue him thanks for the helpe of his presence" (Ps 42:5 GNV). It was a critical phase in the Puritan practice of biblical meditation.

¹¹⁴ Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, 144.

¹¹⁵ Baxter, *Practical Works*, 103.

¹¹⁶ Hall, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 6:60.

¹¹⁷ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 113.

The third stage in the Puritan method of biblical meditation was to engage the will. This related to the last part of Swinnock's definition: "A serious applying the mind to some sacred subject, till the affections be warmed and quickened, and the resolution heightened and strengthened thereby, against what is evil, and for that which is good."¹¹⁸ In Swinnock's paradigm the human soul loves what it identifies as good and desires it when it is absent. In contrast to this the soul hates what it identifies as evil. Through biblical meditation, the soul is set on God and grows in adoration for God. This increased adoration results in a greater hatred of sin and the desire for obedience.¹¹⁹ This is the final aim of Puritan meditation, obedience to Christ. So, it becomes imperative that in the process of observation and meditation, the Christian looks for personal and practical application to their life. Hall put it this way when he says that meditation is the "bending of the mind upon some spiritual object through divers forms of discourse, until our thoughts come to an issue." In other words, meditation should result in a plan of action. Calamy added, "*Be sure always in your meditation, to join application . . . be sure to draw down your meditation to application, make application to thy own soul.*"¹²⁰ Incorporated into this last stage is focused prayer and this often involved petitioning God for the strength to follow through in obedience. Calamy recommended a prayer like this:

Oh Lord, that I am not able in my self to think a good thought; it is easier for me to cleave a rock in pieces, than to cleave my rocky heart by my own strength; there must be an *Almighty power* to get my heart to be soft; for my heart, Oh Lord, is harder than the nether millstone, and I cannot soften it; I would mourn that I cannot mourn, that I have not power; I can do nothing without power derived from Jesus Christ.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, 425.

¹¹⁹ Yuille, "Conversing with God's Word," 49.

¹²⁰ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 187.

¹²¹ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 194.

Similarly, Swinnock declared that believers do not have the power to carry out meditation and the obedience that should be the result without the work of the Holy Spirit. He stated, “All our power for sacred performances is wholly from another . . . God must give us fresh supplies of his Spirit in every duty, or they cannot be rightly performed.”¹²²

Puritans recommended that the meditation time conclude with praise and thanksgiving to God. Calamy suggested the following: “I say, *conclude with thankfulness*; lift up thy heart to God, and bless his name that hast enlarged thy soul, and enabled thee to spend an hour in meditation of holy things; especially if you find your hearts affected with what you meditate upon.”¹²³

Puritans definitely had an organized structure to their practice of biblical meditation. While the formula was fluid and flexible, it did follow a prescribed and beneficial pattern based on the understanding that human personalities are made up of intellect, affections, and will; and every part of a person should be affected by the word of God. Yuille demonstrates that Swinnock’s methodology of biblical meditation, closely complements the classic Puritan sermon.¹²⁴ In the typical Puritan sermon the preacher would begin by giving an exposition of the text, corresponding to the intellectual part of meditation. This would be followed by explaining points of doctrine which would arise out of the text, a parallel to engaging the affections. Finally, a full third of the sermon would be devoted to how this doctrine applies to all of life, which connects with affecting the will to make it obedient. This observation that Puritan biblical meditation practice closely resembles a Puritan sermon is further

¹²² George Swinnock, *Pastor’s Farewell*, in *Works*, 1:94.

¹²³ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 197.

¹²⁴ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 48.

evidence that biblical meditation was a spiritual discipline that was pervasive in the Puritan community and was practiced by pastors and parishioners alike.

The Goal of Puritan Biblical Meditation

The overarching passion and motivation in Puritan biblical meditation was devotion to and love for God.¹²⁵ Baxter, in speaking about this aim in meditation, prayed for his readers: “May the living God, who is the portion and rest of his saints, make these our carnal minds so spiritual, and our earthly minds so heavenly, that loving him, and delighting in him, may be the work of our lives.”¹²⁶ Calamy commented on this as well:

Divine Meditation is a mighty help to the love of God . . . consideration takes away the curtain, unveils God to a man, and shews him all the beauty and excellency that is in God; and it is like a fiery furnace to kindle a Divine fire of love in the soul of every Christian.¹²⁷

Meditation ignites greater love for the Lord Jesus, as Calamy noted:

A mighty help to the *love of Christ*; for Christ Jesus to an unmeditating Christian is like a book that is sealed, like a treasure that is lock’t up; but Meditation opens this book, unlocks this treasure; and that man that solemnly meditates of the excellency and love of Christ, cannot but love Christ.¹²⁸

Another key purpose for biblical meditation was to assist the process of sanctification. There were other spiritual disciplines which encouraged progressive sanctification including things like prayer, journaling, Bible study, the sacraments, Psalm singing, and the preaching and hearing of the Word.¹²⁹ However, there was one spiritual discipline which was the capstone. Baxter said of biblical meditation that it is the exercise “by which all other duties are improved, and by which the soul digesteth

¹²⁵ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 37.

¹²⁶ Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3.

¹²⁷ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 145–46.

¹²⁸ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 146.

¹²⁹ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 37.

truths and drawth forth their strength for its nourishment and refreshing.”¹³⁰

Swinnock understood that obedience was the desired fruit of meditation.¹³¹ If biblical meditation is that crucial in spiritual growth, then a lack of it would naturally be the cause of many spiritual weaknesses. Calamy stated, “The *reason why people harden their hearts in sin*, and do not repent of their sins, but go on obstinately, is for want of meditation.”¹³² Puritans recognized that an idle mind was a fertile ground for evil thoughts and so biblical meditation was encouraged to help “redeem the time.”¹³³

Swinnock had a clear determined action plan to avoid sin. He wrote,

I have in two or three authors read of five men that met together, and asked each other what means they used to abstain from sin? The first said, the thoughts of the certainty of death, and uncertainty of the time, moved him to live every day as if it were his last day. The second said, he meditated of the day of judgment, and the torments of hell, and they frightened him from meddling with his dangerous enemy, sin. The third considered of the deformity of sin, and beauty of holiness. The fourth, of the abundant happiness provided in heaven for holy ones. The last continually thought of the Lord Jesus Christ and his love, and this made him ashamed to sin against God.¹³⁴

In other words, for Swinnock the way to abstain from sin was to meditate on Scripture. As biblical meditation works on the Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit to increase their love for God and His purposes, in tandem it creates in the Christian a contempt for the world. Calamy noted,

It is a mighty help to the contempt of the world; for the world is like gilded Copper, there is a glittering excellency in it, but meditation of the vanity of the world will wash off all the gilt, the whorish paint, the glittering excellency that is in the world.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, in *Practical Works*, 306.

¹³¹ Yuille, “Conversing with God’s Word,” 50.

¹³² Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 30.

¹³³ Daniel, “Puritan Ladder of Meditation,” 38.

¹³⁴ George Swinnock, *Heaven and Hell*, in *Works*, 3:344.

¹³⁵ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 146.

The purpose and goal of biblical meditation was to experience God and have our affection for him expand, all the while enlarging our hatred for sin. Puritans could testify by experience that the way to grow in grace was to meditate on Scripture.

The Benefits of Biblical Meditation

Puritan biblical meditation was not a task to bear as a heavy burden, but rather the means to experience great joy as a Christian. The benefits from engaging in this spiritual discipline were tremendous. Calamy could speak of how it allowed believers to have the great joy of seeing God and Christ more clearly so that their love for them would overflow.¹³⁶ Biblical meditation also helps Christians to trust in God and His promises. Calamy described this benefit of meditation thus:

It will enable you to rely upon the promises for the good of your souls. Did you when you read the promises of the Bible, chew them, how sweet would they be; the reason why the Promises are not sweet to you, is because you read them, but you do not chew them by meditating upon them; if you did meditate upon them, they would be sweeter than the honey, and the honey-comb, especially if you did join application with meditation.¹³⁷

Another benefit of biblical meditation is that it developed a great understanding of God's mercy and so creates joy and thankfulness for it. Again Calamy described this well:

Divine Meditation is a mighty help to beget in us the grace of thankfulness for the mercies and blessings we receive from God. Certainly it is a great duty that yes upon us to be thankful for Gods mercies; now there is no way to stir you up to thankfulness so much as meditation upon the mercies of God.¹³⁸

The Puritans did not develop the practice of biblical meditation to lay a tedious task upon their spiritual life, but so that they might climb a spiritual ladder from earth to heaven and experience the joy of seeing and experiencing the glory of God in the face

¹³⁶ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 44–46.

¹³⁷ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 49.

¹³⁸ Calamy, *Art of Biblical Meditation*, 52.

of Jesus the Christ. They could testify that biblical meditation rightly exercised was the chief spiritual discipline to encounter God and to resist sin.

Description and Overview of the Calvinistic Baptists

Calvinistic Baptists trace their spirituality to Puritanism.¹³⁹ The first Baptists appeared in the early seventeenth century,¹⁴⁰ and the first Calvinistic Baptist churches emerged in England around 1638.¹⁴¹ The Calvinistic Baptists experienced significant growth in numbers from 1644 through to the 1690s. This growth continued during the years 1662 to 1688 when dissenting churches suffered through three decades of persecution by the state and mob harassment.¹⁴² It was a series of laws known as the Clarendon Code that gave legal justification for the persecution. These laws, passed in the middle of the seventeenth century, made it illegal for worship and evangelism to be permitted outside the confines of the Church of England.¹⁴³ In 1689 religious liberty came in the form of the Act of Toleration which granted the Baptists and other dissenting churches the right to begin new congregations and work to build existing ones.¹⁴⁴ It was the hope of many Pastors and church leaders that Particular Baptists could begin to flourish by reason of this

¹³⁹ Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 14.

¹⁴⁰ Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *The Baptist Story*, 11–24.

¹⁴¹ Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *The Baptist Story*, 41–48.

¹⁴² Michael A. G. Haykin, introduction to *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771), A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (New York: Brill, 1997), 1.

¹⁴³ Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), 15.

¹⁴⁴ Haykin, introduction to *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 1.

new freedom. The reality was sadly different. From 1702 until 1714 the Particular Baptist movement began to diminish.¹⁴⁵

One commonly suggested reason for the decline was the influence of High Calvinism or hyper-Calvinism. Those who held to this system of theology were accused of not offering the Gospel or inviting sinners to repent and trust Christ. Calvinistic Baptists did make High Calvinism the focus of their theology and preaching and this is likely one of the reasons for a decline in their numbers.¹⁴⁶ High Calvinism cannot be given as the lone cause for this decline among the Calvinistic Baptists. One of the other reasons was ongoing legal and social discrimination. The Act of Toleration had given some new freedoms, but essentially limited Calvinistic Baptist preaching to the meeting-house where the congregation gathered for worship. The congregations had the freedom to gather, but only in those buildings that were officially registered as meeting-houses recognized by the bishop or the local Justice of the Peace. At these meeting-houses preaching and evangelism were permissible, but the doors of the meeting-house were required to be braced so they would stay open during times of meeting.¹⁴⁷ Although the Act granted increased freedom of religion it did not grant full civil rights. For instance, there were significant educational hurdles that limited the opportunity for Dissenters to attend Oxford or Cambridge, the most recognized universities.¹⁴⁸ These legal and social restraints assuredly cast the Baptists in a bad light and limited their appeal to new congregants.¹⁴⁹ Another reason for the decline of Baptist churches in the early

¹⁴⁵ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 19.

¹⁴⁷ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 20.

¹⁴⁸ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 20.

¹⁴⁹ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 20.

eighteenth-century had to do with doctrinal controversies and the division that resulted from them.¹⁵⁰

Geography, bad weather, and strong views of autonomy were other catalysts that caused a slump among the Calvinistic Baptists. Many of these churches were in small towns, villages, and hamlets that were not easily accessible because of poorly managed roads that made travel near to impossible especially in the winter months. This limited communication between congregations as well as stifling collaborative efforts in church-planting. The ecclesiology of these churches, with their strong emphasis on local church autonomy, caused further isolation. The only real connection between these churches was their statement of faith, the *Second London Confession of Faith* (1689). There were no more national assemblies, similar to the first one which issued this statement of faith and regional associations were inconsistent in their health as well.¹⁵¹

Another plausible reason for the lack of growth was the way in which the Dissenters viewed the evangelical revival that arose from the Church of England through the ministry of people like evangelists George Whitefield and John Wesley and those associated with them. They were viewed with suspicion by Dissenters because of their association with the Church of England, which was considered apostate.¹⁵² Yet, another reason the Calvinistic Baptists distanced themselves from the Evangelical Revival had to do with what they called “enthusiasm,” an emphasis on remarkable revelations, and special empowerment for the Holy Spirit that displayed itself in various forms of religious excitement.¹⁵³ Some empirical displays

¹⁵⁰ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 22.

¹⁵¹ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 23.

¹⁵² Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 27.

¹⁵³ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 28.

of this excitement consisted in things like calling out, moaning, weeping, as well as falling down. These things were looked upon as extreme by Calvinistic Baptists and not as a work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁴ Although there was some decline among the Calvinistic Baptists of this time, they still had a robust theology and personal spiritual disciplines which they had in common with their Puritan forerunners.

Calvinistic Baptist View of Scripture

For Baptists, the Bible was the “sole rule of faith and practice,”¹⁵⁵ and it would be accurate to say that the Bible has been the primary means for Baptists to experience the grace of God.¹⁵⁶ Since Calvinistic Baptists had such a high regard for the Bible, it was not uncommon for the devout to read the entirety of the Bible as often as once a year.¹⁵⁷

Benjamin Keach (1640–1704) was a Calvinistic Baptist church leader and the pastor of the Horsleydown church in London’s Southwark district. He was a prolific writer and defender of Baptist views.¹⁵⁸ He held to a high view of Scripture, insisting that the proclamation of the Word was the key element that must take place in Baptist worship services.¹⁵⁹ He wrote in response to the question “what pastures doth Christ feed his sheep in? . . . His Word, this is one of his Pastures, and a fat one it is, yea, a most choice and rich Pasture; here is precious feeding.”¹⁶⁰ He wrote

¹⁵⁴ Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul*, 31.

¹⁵⁵ Hinson, “Baptist and Quaker Spirituality,” 332.

¹⁵⁶ Hinson, “Baptist and Quaker Spirituality,” 332.

¹⁵⁷ Hinson, “Baptist and Quaker Spirituality,” 332.

¹⁵⁸ J. Barry Vaughn, “The Glory of a True Church: Benjamin Keach and Church Order among Late Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptists,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 30, no. 4 (October 1995): 47.

¹⁵⁹ Vaughn, “The Glory of a True Church,” 48.

¹⁶⁰ Benjamin Keach, *A Gold Mine Opened* (London: William Marshall, 1694), 130.

concerning the authority of Scripture: “The Holy Scripture is of Divine Authority, and that is the only Rule of Faith and Practise.”¹⁶¹

Anne Dutton (1692–1765) was a Calvinistic Baptist theological writer. While there were some excellent poetesses in the eighteenth century, female theological writers were very few. This makes the theological writings of Dutton unique.¹⁶² Dutton was born in Northampton to devout Congregationalist parents.¹⁶³ She professed faith at the age of thirteen.¹⁶⁴ She was baptized shortly after and she married in 1714,¹⁶⁵ but she experienced the loss of her first husband just a few years later.¹⁶⁶ She returned to Northampton and in the early 1720s married Benjamin Dutton (1691–1747) and who after studying for ministry eventually came to Great Grandsen, Huntingdonshire to serve as pastor. However, Benjamin tragically died at sea in 1747. Dutton lived as a widow for another eighteen years.¹⁶⁷ She dedicated the rest of her life to her writing.¹⁶⁸ She became well known both in England and America for her spirituality expressed through her works.¹⁶⁹ She published 63 books and had extensive correspondence with well-known men in ministry including John

¹⁶¹ Keach, *A Gold Mine Opened*, 85.

¹⁶² Michael Haykin, *A Cloud of Witnesses: Calvinistic Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Times, 2006), 33.

¹⁶³ Haykin, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, 33.

¹⁶⁴ David Gay, *The Spirituality of Anne Dutton* (n.p.: Createspace Independent Pub., 2017), 27.

¹⁶⁵ Gay, *Spirituality of Anne Dutton*, 27.

¹⁶⁶ Haykin, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, 35.

¹⁶⁷ Haykin, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, 35.

¹⁶⁸ Gay, *Spirituality of Anne Dutton*, 27.

¹⁶⁹ Haykin, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, 35.

Wesley, George Whitefield, Daniel Rowland, Howell Harris, James Hervey, and Philip Doddridge as well as many men and women not well known.¹⁷⁰

Dutton held to a high view of Scripture. She was completely convinced that all of what needed to be known about God and salvation was contained in its pages. For this reason, like the Puritans before her, and her fellow Calvinistic Baptists, Dutton believed in the importance of biblical meditation. Dutton would accept no other source of spiritual authority apart from Scripture, as evidenced by this statement:

Since the canon of the Holy Scriptures is complete, and God in these last days has spoken unto us by his Son, we are to have recourse thereto in all things which relate to faith and practice. And we ought to receive no intimation given us . . . until we have first tried it by the sacred oracles, and if it speak not according to this word, there is no light in it, or no light of the divine Spirit given thereby, but we must conclude that is from the evil and delusive spirit. And if any hint should be given elsewhere that agrees with the word of God, and excites our faith in him, and obedience to him, yet is it not to be received as a rule of our faith and practice because it was hinted to us elsewhere, but as it stands in the perfect rule of the word, which alone is sufficient, and appointed of God for our direction both as to what we are to believe and what to do. . . . If what we are told has no support in the Scriptures, it ought to fall to the ground and be utterly rejected.¹⁷¹

John Gill (1697–1771) was a pastor-theologian of considerable influence amongst Calvinistic Baptists. Gill was born in Kettering, Northamptonshire on November 23, 1697,¹⁷² and he was reared and educated in this same town.¹⁷³ Gill proved to be an exceptionally bright and gifted student. In the local grammar school he was taught Latin Classics and gained considerable proficiency in Greek,¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Gay, *Spirituality of Anne Dutton*, 14.

¹⁷¹ Anne Dutton, *Selected Writings of Anne Dutton: Eighteenth-Century, English-Baptist, Woman Theologian*, vol. 1, *Letters*, ed. JoAnn Ford Watson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 361.

¹⁷² Robert W. Oliver, “John Gill (1697-1771),” in *The British Particular Baptists*, vol. 1, *1638-1910*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 147.

¹⁷³ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 176.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and*

including the ability to read the complete Greek New Testament by age 10.¹⁷⁵ Gill's love for reading created a saying among the people of Kettering. To express certainty to a fact they would say that it was "as sure as John Gill is in the bookseller's shop."¹⁷⁶

Gill became the pastor of the now prominent and historic Calvinistic Baptist church that Benjamin Keach had started in Horsleydown Southwark, London in 1719.¹⁷⁷ Gill faithfully served this historic church until his death in 1771.¹⁷⁸ Gill earned the nickname "Dr. Voluminous," by publishing more than 10,000 pages in his lifetime. Between 1735 and 1738 Gill published the four-volume work, *The Cause of God and Truth*, a defense of Calvinism that provided a substantial contribution in the Arminian controversy of his day.¹⁷⁹ Gill was the first Baptist to write a systematic theology¹⁸⁰ and a verse-by-verse commentary on the complete Bible.¹⁸¹

One of the reasons that Gill was a strong proponent of biblical meditation is because he held to a high view of Scripture. In his commentary on Psalm 19 he stated,

All the Scriptures of truth, which are profitable for doctrine; for setting doctrine in a clear light, and for the vindication and establishment of it, and are the rule of doctrine both to preachers and hearers; and which are "perfect," contain the whole mind and will of God, both with respect to faith and practice; whereby the man of God is made perfect, and thoroughly furnished to all good works, (2 Timothy

Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 73.

¹⁷⁵ Timothy George, "John Gill," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 78.

¹⁷⁶ Oliver, "John Gill: His Life and Ministry," in *Life and Thought of John Gill*, 9.

¹⁷⁷ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 178.

¹⁷⁸ Oliver, "John Gill: His Life and Ministry," 46.

¹⁷⁹ Oliver, "John Gill: His Life and Ministry," 26.

¹⁸⁰ Oliver, "John Gill (1697-1771)," 161.

¹⁸¹ Nettles, *By His Grace*, 89.

3:16,17).¹⁸²

For Gill the Scriptures contained the whole mind and will of God with respect to faith and practice. There was no other guide or authority that needed to be consulted.

In his commentary on Psalm 119 Gill spoke about the exceeding riches of the Scriptures in his comments on verse 96 and the phrase “thy commandment is exceedingly broad”:

The word of God is a large field to walk and meditate in; it is sufficient to instruct all men in all ages, both with respect to doctrine and duty, and to make every man of God perfect; it has such a height and depth of doctrine and mysteries in it as can never be fully reached and fathomed, and such a breadth as is not to be measured: the fulness of the Scripture can never be exhausted; the promises of it reach to this life, and that which is to come; and the precepts of it are so large, that no works of righteousness done by men are adequate and proportionate to them; no righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ, is as large and as broad as those commandments.¹⁸³

Gill was convinced that in the Scripture there is a limitless source of knowledge for the believer. The Bible is sufficient to instruct every person in every age. It never becomes irrelevant, and it provides the believer with the great opportunity to perpetually meditate while never exhausting the rich truths it contains.

Commenting on the truthfulness of Scripture, Gill wrote the following in his commentary on 2 Timothy (specifically 2 Tim 2:15): “The Scriptures of truth, (Daniel 10:21) which come from the God of truth, are concerning Christ, who is the truth, and are dictated and led into by the spirit of truth, and contain in them nothing but truth.”¹⁸⁴ The Scriptures were truth and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were involved together in ensuring that the words of Scripture contain nothing but the truth. For this reason, they should be studied and meditated with diligence and care. Since the Scriptures were God’s truth, containing inexhaustible riches and the final authority for

¹⁸² John Gill, *Judges to Psalm 22, Gill’s Commentary* (1852–1854; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 2:938.

¹⁸³ John Gill, *Psalm 23 to Isaiah, Gill’s Commentary*, 3:345.

¹⁸⁴ John Gill, *Romans to Revelation, Gill’s Commentary*, 6:634.

faith and practice, Gill believed in the importance of careful translation so that every person and nation could have access to the Word of God. In his words, “As it has been the will of God, and appears absolutely necessary that so it should be, that the Bible should be translated into different languages, that all may read it, and some particularly may receive benefit by it.”¹⁸⁵

Gill insisted on the importance of the reading and study of the Scriptures by every Christian. Thus, he declared in his sermon on Jeremiah 6:16:

Let us search the Scriptures daily and diligently, and the rather, since they testify of Christ, of his person, offices, of his doctrines and ordinances. . . . There are *the more sure word of prophecy*... both with respect to the way of salvation, and to the way of our duty. These guide us to the old paths, and shew us where is the good way in which we should walk; and when we are tempted to turn to the right hand, or the left, it is best to hearken to the voice of the word behind us, saying, *This is the way, walk in it.*¹⁸⁶

Baptist Practice of Biblical Meditation

The English Calvinistic Baptists, like the Puritans, practiced a vibrant personal piety. They meditated on Scripture in a manner similar to the *lectio divina* and like the Puritans, they practiced family worship where the Scriptures were read at mealtimes. After the Scriptures were read, families would sit in silence listening to the message contained in them before eating.¹⁸⁷

Keach exhorted Baptist believers to meditate on Scripture. He wrote, “The Study, Meditation, and Obedience to God’s Word, yields more Satisfaction, Joy and Delight than any worldly men find earthly Profits or sensual Pleasures.”¹⁸⁸ Biblical

¹⁸⁵ John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: or A System of Evangelical Truths Deduced From the Sacred Scriptures* (London: W. Winterbotham, 1796), 1:19.

¹⁸⁶ John Gill, “The Scriptures: The Only Guide in Matters of Religion, Jeremiah 6:16,” in *Sermons and Tracts of John Gill* (1751; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1999), 22.

¹⁸⁷ Hinson, “Baptist and Quaker Spirituality,” 332.

¹⁸⁸ Keach, *A Gold Mine Opened*, 130.

meditation was essential in the life of pastors. Keach stated that a pastor “must give himself to the ministry of the Word and prayer; and continue in reading [and] meditation.”¹⁸⁹

Meditation was not limited to pastors, but was possible for any Christian, because God had created humans with the capacity to reason; and so Keach wrote: “The Soul is capable of Divine Contemplation, it can muse, meditate and contemplate on God the highest and chiefest Being; no other Creatures are able to do this, because they have no rationale souls.”¹⁹⁰ Keach understood then, like the Puritans before him, that biblical meditation first involved the power of human reason. His description of meditation in his work *The Breach Repaired in God’s Worship* confirms this: “To *think, muse* or meditate, is an Internal Act of the Mind, wherein the Excellency of the Soul is discovered unto a Man’s own self.”¹⁹¹ Meditation on biblical truth is what promotes the understanding of it. Keach wrote, “The Word of Christ ought to dwell in us richly, that we may meditate thereon, and be able to preach it, hear it, and understand it.”¹⁹² Keach explained the way to discover God’s truth and stated that truth “may be found upon a diligent search and meditation of the Scripture.”¹⁹³ The way to get the most profit from the study of Scripture was to apply it and a deeper understanding came through the practice of biblical meditation. Keach asked of those professing to believe whether they have “by Faith applied the Word, and by Meditation digested it.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scriptural Metaphors* (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1858), 831.

¹⁹⁰ Keach, *A Gold Mine Opened*, 402.

¹⁹¹ Benjamin Keach, *The Breach Repaired in God’s Worship* (London: John Hancock, 1691), 7.

¹⁹² Keach, *The Breach Repaired*, 91.

¹⁹³ Keach, *Tropologia*, 231.

¹⁹⁴ Keach, *A Gold Mine Opened*, 343.

Keach recognized that biblical meditation should be carried out as a part of a believer's regular personal piety. He wrote, "Be frequent in the exercise of religious duties, prayer, meditation, reading God's word, and Christian conference."¹⁹⁵ Keach advocated for a daily practice: "Set apart stated seasons, every day for prayer, reading God's word, and sacred meditation."¹⁹⁶ Again he wrote, "The Word of God is a thing that all true Christians take much delight to behold, daily pry and look into, by reading and meditation."¹⁹⁷ Regular participation in this spiritual discipline was a way to prove that a believer had a desire for salvation. To ignore it was a potential indication that one was not interested in salvation. Keach wrote the following concerning those who neglect salvation:

"[It is] a hard thing to enter in at the Straight Gate, Self-denial is of absolute necessity. O, but it is too difficult for this sort, they can't *pray, read, meditate*; they don't love to hear Sermons, they do not care to put themselves upon Spiritual duties."¹⁹⁸

In a manner analogous to the Puritans, Keach advocated for the need to clear the mind of worldly concerns so that the Christian could focus on the discipline of biblical meditation. In his exposition of the parable of the sower, Keach wrote,

Such that clog themselves with too much business, so that their hearts are almost distracted; alas, they allow themselves no time for holy duties, no leisure for the service of God, they have no time to meditate on the word, or on what they perhaps hear on the Lord's day, and so the words are choked by these thorns.¹⁹⁹

The believer must rid their minds of earthly concerns or they will be frustrated in their efforts to meditate on Scripture. Keach explained the struggle this

¹⁹⁵ Keach, *Tropologia*, 337.

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin Keach, *The Travels of True Godliness* (Easingwold, England: Thomas Gill, 1845), 180.

¹⁹⁷ Keach, *Tropologia*, 587.

¹⁹⁸ Keach, *A Gold Mine Opened*, 448.

¹⁹⁹ Benjamin Keach, *An Exposition of the Parables, and Express Similitudes of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Aylott and Co., 1858), 161.

way: “Nor can we meditate but little on spiritual things and objects; the mind is so filled with earthly cogitations.”²⁰⁰

However, the believer is not alone in their effort to meditate. There is the Holy Spirit who helps: “By the Spirit we are helped to meditate on God, and on his Word; and hereby our Meditations are sweet to our Souls.”²⁰¹ When a believer comes to focused thoughts on Jesus, the Holy Spirit assists the believer: “It is the work and office of the Spirit to make the whole work of the meditation of Christ effectual to the souls of the elect.”²⁰²

Keach recognized that many benefits were experienced by the believer as a result of practicing biblical meditation. There was great benefit that resulted from meditating on Christ’s righteousness applied to the believer. When a Christian did not meditate on Christ’s righteousness, spiritual frailty likely resulted. Keach explained, “Some are weak in Faith because they pore more on their own inward corruptions, than meditate on Christ’s righteousness, more on their own emptiness than on Christ’s fullness.”²⁰³

Meditation thus provides strength for the Christian. Keach in his comment on Isaiah 40:31 answered the question, how are believers provided with strength to “mount up like eagles.” The answer he gave was, “They mount up by divine meditation.”²⁰⁴

Anne Dutton in her personal piety and her writings recognized the necessity of exercising the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation. Following her conversion, she

²⁰⁰ Keach, *An Exposition of the Parables*, 156.

²⁰¹ Keach, *A Gold Mine Opened*, 260.

²⁰² Keach, *Tropologia*, 550.

²⁰³ Keach, *Tropologia*, 616.

²⁰⁴ Keach, *Tropologia*, 728.

wrote, “Religious duties were now very precious to me—such as hearing, reading, praying, meditation, and converse with Christians—and much of God I enjoyed in them.”²⁰⁵ Dutton recognized, along with the Puritans, that a mind that was idle was in danger of drifting into sinful thoughts that could lead to sinful actions. She wrote, “Watch your thoughts, that they run not out from God to needless things and sinful objects. And whenever they attempt it, then, in the name and strength of the Lord, call them back instantly, that at his requirement you may give him your heart.”²⁰⁶ Instead of allowing the mind to wander a devout believer should “delight in the precious word of God; read, hear, and meditate thereon.”²⁰⁷ This was all a part of what a pious believer should do: “Redeem the time; it is very precious.”²⁰⁸

Dutton adhered to the Puritan understanding of the human personality as one which is tripartite. She understood that biblical meditation and an understanding of biblical truth involved more than the intellect. The intellect was of necessity involved first, but the truth must descend into the heart and then it would affect the human will. For spiritual growth and transformation this pattern was fundamental. She explained it in this way:

There is a vast difference between a conviction of the doctrine of grace in the head and adoring the grace of that doctrine in the heart. The first usually goes before—and there seems to be a necessity that it should go before—in order to [attain] the other, for the understanding must first know the truth before the will can embrace it. A speculative knowledge of the truth—that goes no further than a mere outward notion of it—may be found in a natural man. This knowledge of the truth is a cold, unaffecting and un-attracting knowledge that leaves the will and affections just where it found them.

The understanding discerns the truth in its beauty, glory and excellency; the

²⁰⁵ Gay, *Spirituality of Anne Dutton*, 31.

²⁰⁶ Anne Dutton, *Selected Writings of Anne Dutton: Eighteenth-Century, English-Baptist, Woman Theologian*, vol. 7, *Words of Grace*, ed. JoAnn Ford Watson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2015), 81.

²⁰⁷ Dutton, *Words of Grace*, 81.

²⁰⁸ Dutton, *Words of Grace*, 82.

judgment approves it; and the will and affections embrace and clasp about it. In a word, the whole soul unites with the truth, and is changed into the image of it.²⁰⁹

Dutton understood that the spiritual discipline that would provide the catalyst to bring biblical truth from the head to the heart and finally to the will was biblical meditation.

Gill also saw the practice of biblical meditation as a spiritual discipline that should be preeminent in the preparation of a minister of the Gospel. Of the work of the ministry he could say it “requires much reading of the Scriptures, frequent prayer, and constant meditation and study.”²¹⁰ Gill related his exposition of 2 Corinthians 6:1 to those engaged in pastoral ministry. He exhorted them to be diligent in the use of the spiritual gifts given them by God. Biblical meditation was a necessary discipline along with study of the word and prayer. He wrote,

Be careful that the gifts bestowed on you do not lie neglected and useless, but that you use and improve them to the advantage, of the church and glory of Christ, by giving up yourselves to study, meditation, and prayer, and by laboring constantly in the word and doctrine.²¹¹

Yet, the practice of biblical meditation was not reserved for pastors and those in vocational ministry. Gill was convinced that biblical meditation is a spiritual discipline that is incumbent for all believers. In response to hearing the word preached Gill advised every believer to

retire privately, and meditate upon what they have heard; the beasts that were accounted clean under the law, were such as chewed the cud; hearers of the word should endeavour to fetch back and call over again what they have heard, when their meditation on it is often as sweet or sweeter than at the first hearing it.²¹²

In his exposition of Romans 12:2, Gill spoke of the use of means that the Spirit of God has to aid the believer in the renewal of their minds. Biblical meditation was one of those

²⁰⁹ Dutton, *Letters*, 174.

²¹⁰ John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (London: W. H. Collingridge: 1855), 45.

²¹¹ Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 45.

²¹² John Gill, *Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity* (Philadelphia: Delaplaine and Hellings, 1810), 577.

means. He put it this way: “Make use of those means which the Spirit of God owns for this purpose, attending to the spiritual exercises of religion, as reading, meditation, prayer, conference, the ministration of the word and ordinances, which is the reverse of conformity to the world.”²¹³ In his exposition of Psalm 1, Gill explains the meaning and importance of biblical meditation. He explains what it means to meditate on the law according to Psalm 1:2: “This is to be understood of a diligent reading and serious consideration of it; and of the employment of the thoughts, and of deep study upon it, in order to find out the sense and meaning of it.”²¹⁴

Gill expanded on his definition of biblical meditation when he explained from Psalm 19:14, the phrase, “and the meditation of my heart.” He stated that this referred to “his inward thoughts continually revolving in his mind; or his meditation on the word of God and divine things; or mental prayer, which is not expressed, only conceived in the mind.”²¹⁵ In his exposition on 1 Timothy 4:15, and the phrase “meditate on these things,” Gill stated,

Not only on those instructions, advices, and exhortations, which the apostle had given him, throughout this chapter, which might be very useful to him, often to think of, and revolve in his mind, and seriously consider and reflect upon; but upon the Scriptures, the reading of which he had recommended to him, and the doctrines contained therein; it becomes every man not only to read, but meditate on the word of God, and much more ministers of the Gospel. The Scriptures should be read with care, and be industriously and laboriously searched into, as men dig in mines for silver or golden ore; and passages in it should be carefully compared together, the more obscure with those that are more plain and easy; and the whole is to be studied with great attention and application.²¹⁶

In a manner that appears patterned after the Puritans, Gill recommended that in the process of meditation, the believer should ask a variety of questions of a text. A text

²¹³ Gill, *Romans to Revelation, Gill's Commentary*, 6:108.

²¹⁴ Gill, *Judges to Psalm 22, Gill's Commentary*, 2:874.

²¹⁵ Gill, *Judges to Psalm 22, Gill's Commentary*, 2:940–41.

²¹⁶ Gill, *Romans to Revelation, Gill's Commentary*, 6:609–10.

should be examined from different viewpoints and perspectives. Gill, in his commentary on Psalm 48:9, stated the following in his exposition of the phrase “We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God”:

The lovingkindness of God towards his people in Christ is a very delightful and profitable subject to dwell in meditation upon, to consider the objects, instances, cause, and nature of it; and serves greatly to encourage faith and hope, to draw out love to God, and engage to a ready and cheerful obedience to his will.²¹⁷

Gill wrote about how the word meditation means talking or muttering in his exposition of Psalm 105:2. He described the importance of meditating on the works of God by speaking about them to oneself and to others. Part of this would be soliloquy after the Puritan model, yet Gill explained that meditation can be done with others when the discussion is focused. In expounding on the phrase “talk ye of all his wondrous works,” Gill stated that

all the works of the Lord are wonderful; what David elsewhere says of himself may be said of them, that they are wonderfully made, even the least and most inconsiderable of them; and especially his works of grace, when it is observed for whom they are performed, or on whom they are wrought; sinful creatures, enemies to God, and deserving of his wrath. These are to be talked of freely and frequently, in friendly conversation, in order to gain a further knowledge of them, and warm each others hearts with them, and to lead into adoring and admiring views of the love and grace of God in them; and all of them deserve notice, none should be omitted, all are worthy of consideration and contemplation; for so the words may be rendered, “meditate on all his wondrous works.” Here is a large field for meditation; and when the heart is in a proper frame for it, meditation on the works of God is sweet, pleasant, and profitable.²¹⁸

Gill, like the Puritans and Dutton, indicated that biblical meditation was necessary to avoid idle and wondering thoughts. In his exposition on 1 Peter 1:13, and the phrase “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind,” Gill stated,

With the girdle of truth; (see Eph 6:14) since angels desire to look into the mysteries of grace, do you apply your minds, and diligently attend unto them, in opposition to all loose and vagrant thoughts of the mind, about other things: give yourselves up

²¹⁷ Gill, *Psalm 23 to Isaiah, Gill's Commentary*, 3:81.

²¹⁸ Gill, *Psalm 23 to Isaiah, Gill's Commentary*, 3:282.

wholly to them, meditate upon them, employ yourselves in them, and about them.²¹⁹

Gill, after the manner of the Puritans, indicated that solitude was an important part of preparation for biblical meditation. In his explanation of Genesis 24:63, he commented on the phrase, “and Isaac went out to meditate in the field and eventide.” He wrote,

Both the time and place were very proper for meditation: the place, “in the field”: where he might view the works of nature, and be led to the Creator of them, and the praise of him, and where he might be alone, and nothing to disturb his thoughts: and the time, “at evening”; after the labour, care, and hurry of the day were over, and before repose at night, and when the air was cool and refreshing, and everything was assisting to, and served to compose the mind, and help thought and contemplation.²²⁰

Gill explained this further in his exposition of Mark 6:31. In this text Jesus took his disciples away from the crowds so that they might rest and be refreshed. Gill commented that Jesus took the disciples away so that “they might be free from noise and hurry, and take some rest and refreshment.” The reason was because they had no opportunity for the solitude needed for spiritual refreshment and to engage in private spiritual disciplines including biblical meditation. He wrote, “So that there was no opportunity of private meditation and prayer, nor of spiritual converse together.”²²¹ Gill understood that solitude was required so that a believer could focus and properly meditate.

It was not just the understanding of Scripture that should come through meditation. Gill, like the Puritans before him, understood that biblical meditation should result in obedience. In his exposition on Philippians 4:8 and the phrase “think on these things,” Gill wrote, “Meditate upon them, revolve them in your minds, seriously consider them, and reason with yourselves about them, in order to put them

²¹⁹ Gill, *Romans to Revelation, Gill’s Commentary*, 6:811.

²²⁰ Gill, *Genesis to Judges, Gill’s Commentary*, 1:136.

²²¹ Gill, *Matthew to Acts, Gill’s Commentary*, 5:346.

into practice.”²²² Gill, in his comments on Psalm 119:48, spoke of how meditation on God’s Word affords a great opportunity for obedience. He commented on the phrase, “and I will meditate on thy statutes,” and stated, “and thereby get a better understanding of them, and be in a better disposition and capacity to keep them.”²²³ Gill indicated that meditation was effectual in assisting the believer in their battle with sin. This was a primary goal of meditation and so Gill stated, “That by meditation, and daily exercise of virtue, sin may be so extirpated out of the minds of men, that no root or fibre of it may remain.”²²⁴ In his commentary on Jude 1:21, Gill unpacked the phrase “keep yourselves in the love of God,” and noted that this is done through the process of meditation. By meditating on this topic, the Christian could do battle when Satan would tempt them to sin:

By which may be meant either the grace and favour of God, that love with which God loves his people; and then the exhortation to the saints to keep themselves in it is, to set it always before them, to keep it constantly in view, to exercise faith on it, firmly believing their interest in it; as also to meditate on it, give themselves up wholly to the contemplation of it, and employ their thoughts constantly about it, which is the foundation of all grace here, and glory hereafter; or to preserve themselves by it, for so the words may be rendered, “preserve yourselves by the love of God”; against Satan’s temptations, the snares of the world, and the lusts of the flesh; whenever Satan solicits to sin, and any snare is laid to draw into it, and the flesh attempts to be predominant, saints should betake themselves to the love of God, as to a strong hold and preservative against sin.²²⁵

Gill followed the thoughts of the Puritans concerning meditation and prayer. Meditation should not happen without prayer. Biblical meditation informs and improves our prayers. In his commentary on Psalm 119:148 Gill unpacked the phrase “Mine eyes prevent the [night] watches, that I might meditate in thy word.” He wrote,

²²² Gill, *Romans to Revelation, Gill’s Commentary*, 6:497.

²²³ Gill, *Psalms 23 to Isaiah, Gill’s Commentary*, 3:338.

²²⁴ Gill, *Cause of God and Truth*, 223.

²²⁵ Gill, *Romans to Revelation, Gill’s Commentary*, 6:929.

He rose so early, in order to give himself up to meditation on the word of God; that he might be better instructed in the knowledge of divine things; that he might have solace and comfort from thence under his afflictions; and that he might be better furnished for the work of prayer; for the more familiar the word of God is to us, the better able we are to speak to God in his own language.²²⁶

Again, in his commentary on Psalm 5:1 Gill stated, “Meditation is requisite to prayer, and should go before it; which is necessary in order to pray with the understanding; nor should men utter anything rashly and hastily before the Lord.”²²⁷

Like the Puritans before him, Gill wrote about the many benefits of biblical meditation. He commented on the relief from trouble that meditation can bring in his exposition of Psalm 77:12. He wrote,

I will meditate also of all thy work, etc. Or “works,” which were many; he desired not to forget any of them, but remember the multitude of his tender mercies, and not only call them to mind, but dwell upon them in his meditations and contemplations, in order to gain some relief by them under his present circumstances.²²⁸

Meditation was a means by which a believer could gain greater joy in God by providing a deeper understanding of the triune God. Gill, in his commentary on Isaiah 29:19 wrote: “Spiritual joy may be increased by the discoveries of the love of God; by fresh views of Christ, through an increase of knowledge of him, and faith in him; by means of meditation and prayer, and by reading and hearing the word.”²³⁰ Gill spoke with delight about the benefits of biblical meditation. Speaking of the love of God, Gill said this:

What makes the love of God greater cause of joy is, that it is everlasting and unchangeable. . . . every thought concerning it, meditation upon it, and discovery of it, fills with joy unspeakable; a thought of it is with the greatest pleasure and delight; meditation on it is sweet; and while musing upon it, the fire of divine love is inflamed, and burns within, and breaks forth in expressions of joy and gladness.²³¹

²²⁶ Gill, *Psalm 23 to Isaiah, Gill's Commentary*, 3:353.

²²⁷ Gill, *Judges to Psalm 22, Gill's Commentary*, 2:886.

²²⁸ Gill, *Psalm 23 to Isaiah, Gill's Commentary*, 3:182.

²³⁰ Gill, *Psalm 23 to Isaiah, Gill's Commentary*, 3:863.

²³¹ Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Winterbotham, 1796), 485.

For Calvinistic Baptists, like Gill, biblical meditation had the same goal and result as it did for the Puritans. Through meditation a deeper love for God was ignited, resulting in the overwhelming experience of intense joy and pleasure in God the ultimate goal of biblical meditation.

Conclusion

Puritans and Calvinistic Baptists practiced a robust method of biblical meditation. Among the spiritual disciplines it reigned supreme. If a believer was struggling with anxiety and doubts, the Puritan and Calvinistic Baptist solution would be to meditate on the promise of God, or on the wonders of the cross. If a Christian was desiring to experience more of the presence of God, the advice would be to find a place of solitude and meditate on Scripture. In order to grow in grace and avoid sin, meditate on Scripture. Puritans and Calvinistic Baptists, like all devout Christians, desired to encounter the living God in intimate and personal ways. The method was not a mystery to them. They did not try to meet with God in ways that circumvented Scripture. To have the joy of the deepest and most meaningful encounters with God one must regularly practice the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLICAL MEDITATION IN THE LIFE OF ANDREW FULLER

Introduction

Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) was a Calvinistic pastor-theologian who had a monumental influence on evangelical Christianity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His theological works were the catalyst that encouraged Calvinistic Baptist preachers to shift from their High Calvinism, to offering the gospel to lost sinners, inviting them to repent and trust in Christ alone for salvation. Fuller—through works like *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*—provided the biblical justification that encouraged not just evangelistic preaching, but personal evangelism and overseas missions.¹

This chapter examines the role that biblical meditation played in Andrew Fuller’s life. It begins with an overview of his life. It considers his rich view of Scripture and finally his practice of biblical meditation. First consideration will be given to Fuller’s personal piety and his practice of meditation as evidenced in his diary. This will be followed by an examination of several of his sermons.

Biographical Sketch

Andrew Fuller was born February 6, 1754, at Wicken, a tiny agricultural village in south Cambridgeshire.² His father Robert Fuller (1723–1781) and his

¹ Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-Century Particular Baptist Life*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 8 (Carlisle, PA: Paternoster, 2003), 139.

² Michael A. G. Haykin, “Sweet Sensibility: Andrew Fuller’s Defense of Religious

mother, Philppa Gunton (1726–1816), were Baptists. Andrew had two older brothers Robert (b.1747) and John (b.1748).³ Approximately two and a half miles from Wicken was Soham, where the Fuller family attended the local Baptist church. When Fuller was about seven years old they moved to Soham. John Eve (d. 1782), who because of his High Calvinism did not believe in offering the gospel freely to sinners, was the pastor at that time.⁴ Fuller was an ardent reader and began to search for answers to his spiritual questions from Christian literary works. Two works that had considerable impact were the spiritual autobiography of John Bunyan (1628–1688), *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and the *Gospel Sonnets* of Ralph Erksine (1685–1752).⁵ Fuller experienced a profound conversion in the fall of 1769.⁶ He was baptized in April of 1770 at the age of 16.⁷

An important facet of Fuller’s personality was his strong desire and capacity to begin and maintain “spiritual” friendships.⁸ It would be a practice that would frame the entirety of his life and ministry. A man named John Diver, who at roughly 40 years of age, was baptized at the same time as Fuller became Fuller’s first “spiritual” friend and confidant.⁹ Diver would later become a deacon in the Soham

Affections,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 7, no. 2 (2015): 198.

³ Nigel David Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality and Eminent Usefulness: Andrew Fuller’s (1754-1815) Pastoral Theology in his Ordination Sermons” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2009), 19.

⁴ Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality,” 20.

⁵ Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality,” 21.

⁶ Haykin, “Sweet Sensibility,” 198.

⁷ L. Rush Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible: The Baptist Doctrines of Biblical Inspiration and Religious Authority in Historical Perspective* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 111.

⁸ Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2001), 42.

⁹ Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 17.

church during the time Fuller was the pastor. Ministry in the church began with Fuller reading Scripture during worship services and commenting on it. In January of 1774, the Soham church set him aside for ministry.¹⁰ Fuller was officially called to be the pastor in 1775¹¹ and was ordained in May of that year.¹² Fuller pastored the church at Soham for seven years¹³ until 1782.¹⁴ Fuller agonized about leaving Soham to go to the Kettering church when they extended to him a call. Fuller eventually accepted the call and moved to Kettering in October of 1782.¹⁵

The year after he became the pastor at Soham, Fuller married Sarah Gardiner (1756-1792).¹⁶ Sarah was a member of the church at Soham, and they were married December 23, 1776.¹⁷ They were married for sixteen years and during that time the couple had eleven children, of whom eight died in infancy or early childhood.¹⁸ Sarah passed away after a battle with mental illness. During some of the bouts of mental illness she saw Andrew as an imposter who had crept into the house. Fuller wrote, “‘No,’ she would say to me, with a countenance full of inexpressible anguish, ‘This is not my home . . . you are not my husband . . . these are not my children.’”¹⁹ Through the grief of the loss of Sarah, Fuller was still able to be a part of

¹⁰ Bush and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 111–12.

¹¹ Haykin, “Sweet Sensibility,” 198.

¹² Bush and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 112.

¹³ Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality,” 30.

¹⁴ Haykin, “Sweet Sensibility,” 198.

¹⁵ Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality,” 32.

¹⁶ John Piper, *Andrew Fuller: Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Missions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 19.

¹⁷ Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality,” 28.

¹⁸ Piper, *Andrew Fuller*, 20.

¹⁹ Andrew Gunton Fuller, “Memoir,” in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller, With A*

the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in October 1792, just two months after her passing.²⁰ Fuller married again on December 30, 1794. This second marriage was to Miss Ann Coles (d.1825), daughter of the Rev. William Coles (1735–1809), a Baptist pastor from Ampthill in Bedfordshire.²¹ Ann would outlive Fuller by ten years.²²

While Fuller was an Evangelical Calvinist, the writings of John Calvin had a relatively minor role in shaping his theology. Rather, Fuller was immersed in the Puritans and referenced Charnock, Goodwin, Bunyan, and Owen more than Calvin.²³ When commenting on Owen’s influence on his own life, Fuller wrote: “I never met with anything of importance in his writings on which I saw any reason to animadvert; so far from it, that I know of no writer for whom I have so great an esteem.”²⁴

Fuller also read and was influenced greatly by the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Ten days before his death on May 7, 1815, he dictated a letter to Ryland with the purpose of defending Edwards.²⁵ In this letter he wrote,

We have heard some, who have been giving out of late that “if Sutcliff and some others had preached more of Christ and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful.” If those who talk thus, preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is.²⁶

Memoir of his life by the Rev. Andrew Gunton Fuller (1845; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 1:29.

²⁰ Piper, *Andrew Fuller*, 20.

²¹ Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality,” 29.

²² Piper, *Andrew Fuller*, 20.

²³ Piper, *Andrew Fuller*, 30.

²⁴ Fuller, *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:39.

²⁵ Piper, *Andrew Fuller*, 31.

²⁶ Fuller, *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:101.

The move to the Kettering Baptist Church brought some important changes into Fuller's life. This church had a membership of 88 at the time Fuller was called, but the number of "hearers" was considerably higher. By the time Fuller died the membership had grown to 174 with approximately 1,000 hearers.²⁷ The population of Kettering was only about 3,000.²⁸ The move to Kettering provided Fuller with more spiritual friendships. On May 28, 1776 Fuller met John Sutcliff (1752–1814) at the Northamptonshire Association meeting in Onley, where Sutcliff was the pastor of the Calvinistic Baptist Church. In 1778 Fuller met John Ryland Jr. (1753–1825). These men became lifelong friends who shared ministry life together as they worked in close cooperation in the work of their denomination and most notably through the formation and promotion of the Baptist Missionary Society.²⁹

It was Ryland who received a copy of Jonathan Edward's *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies concerning the Last Time*, which he promptly shared with Sutcliffe and Fuller. This was the impetus that led to them meeting regularly to pray for revival.³⁰ Around this time Fuller began his work on *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, with an edition that he never intended to publish that was written in 1781.³¹ The second edition was published in 1801.³² This work provided the theological foundation and motivation for the

²⁷ Wheeler, "Eminent Spirituality," 32.

²⁸ Piper, *Andrew Fuller*, 19.

²⁹ Wheeler, "Eminent Spirituality," 27.

³⁰ Wheeler, "Eminent Spirituality," 33–34.

³¹ Wheeler, "Eminent Spirituality."

³² Haykin, "Sweet Sensibility," 199.

formation of the Baptist Missionary Society. It was this band of Baptist pastors, including William Carey (1761–1834), that formed the society that first sent Carey to India. John Ryland wrote the story regarding the famous “rope holder” image. He reported,

Our undertaking to India really appeared to me, on its commencement, to be somewhat like a few men, who were deliberating about the importance of penetrating into a deep mine, which had never before been explored, [and] we had no one to guide us; and while we were thus deliberating, Carey, as it were, said “Well, I will go down, if you will hold the rope.” But before he went down . . . he, as it seemed to me, took an oath from each of us, at the mouth of the pit, to this effect—that “while we lived, we should never let go of the rope.”³³

Fuller worked tirelessly on behalf of the mission, travelling extensively to raise support. For over 21 years he served as the thinker, letter writer, fund-raiser and main promoter of society.³⁴

Fuller was used in mighty ways to shape the Calvinistic Baptists of his day. He served as a faithful pastor for over 40 years, but it could be argued that his most abiding contributions for the cause of Christ were his published theological works and his partnership in founding the Baptist Missionary Society.³⁵ Ryland, in Fuller’s funeral sermon stated that Fuller was, “perhaps the most judicious and able theological writer, that ever belonged to our denomination.”³⁶ It was not only Fuller’s good friends who felt the weight of his influence. Joseph Belcher, the editor of the American edition of Fuller’s collective works, was convinced that Fuller’s works would “go down to posterity side by side with the immortal works of the elder

³³ Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 136.

³⁴ Piper, *Andrew Fuller*, 22.

³⁵ Andrew J. Spencer, “Andrew Fuller and the Doctrine of Revelation,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 57, no. 2 (2015): 207.

³⁶ John Ryland, *The Indwelling and Righteousness of Christ no Security against Corporeal Death, but the Source of Spiritual and Eternal Life* (London: W. Burton & Son, 1815), 2–3.

president [Jonathan Edwards].”³⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon described Fuller as “the greatest theologian” of his century.³⁸ However, the best description of Fuller may have come from David Phillips, a nineteenth-century Welsh biographer, when he called Fuller, “the elephant of Kettering”—clearly an inference to his weighty influence as a formidable theologian and apologist.³⁹

Fuller’s View of Scripture

Fuller, like the Puritans and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists, held to a high view of Scripture. Soham was relatively isolated and Fuller was in some sense thrust into the role of pastor there, and so he learned to rely predominately on the Scriptures. He regarded the Scriptures as “the infallible standard of faith and practice.”⁴⁰ Fuller commented on Hebrew 5:12 and the nature of the Scriptures when he expounded on the phrase “the oracles of God.” He wrote, “It is a proper term by which the sacred Scriptures were denominated, strongly expressive of their Divine inspiration and infallibility; in them God speaks; and to them it becomes us to hearken.”⁴¹ Fuller was deeply engaged with the historical tradition that flowed from Augustine to Calvin through the Puritans and down to Edwards. However, he gave full preference to the Scriptures, and immersed himself in the Bible which was always predominant in his mind and heart.⁴² Fuller described the chief importance of the

³⁷ Joseph Belcher, preface, *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:viii.

³⁸ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted in Gilbert Laws, *Andrew Fuller: Pastor, Theologian, Ropeholder* (London: Carey Press, 1942), 127.

³⁹ David Phillips, *Memoir of the Life, Labors, and Extensive Usefulness of the Rev. Christmas Evans* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1843), 74.

⁴⁰ Andrew Fuller, *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared, as to their Moral Tendency*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 2:196.

⁴¹ Fuller, *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:160.

⁴² Piper, *Andrew Fuller*, 29.

Scripture in this way, “Lord, thou hast given me a determination to take up no principle at second hand; but to search for everything at the pure fountain of thy word.”⁴³ Concerning the extent of inspiration, Fuller stated: “It is certain that those who wrote the books which compose the Old and New Testaments profess to have been Divinely inspired.”⁴⁴

Fuller was convinced that the Holy Spirit was the ultimate author of the Scriptures. He wrote, “The Old and New Testaments are dictated by one and the same Spirit.”⁴⁵ Yet, Fuller did recognize that this was not a direct dictation, but that the Holy Spirit worked through the human author to achieve the divine intent. Fuller found room for both the divine and human authors when considering the origin of Scripture. He stated,

It is true that, having been communicated through human mediums, we may expect them, in a measure, to be humanized; the peculiar turn and talents of each writer will be visible, and this will give them the character of variety; but, amidst all this variety, a mind capable of discerning the Divine excellence will plainly perceive in them the finger of God.⁴⁶

It was because of his understanding of human limitations and fallibility, that Fuller insisted the work of the Holy Spirit was indispensable in the formation of God’s Word. Concerning the human side of the authorship of Scripture, he wrote, “As men, they were subject to human imperfections; if, therefore, they had not been influenced by Divine inspiration, blemishes of this kind must have appeared in their writings, as well as in those of other men.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Fuller, *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:20.

⁴⁴ Andrew Fuller, *Letters on Systematic Divinity*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:699.

⁴⁵ Fuller, *Letters on Systematic Divinity*, 1:700.

⁴⁶ Fuller, *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 2:68.

⁴⁷ Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Its Own Witness*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 2:71.

Before accepting the call to Kettering Baptist Church, Fuller provided the church⁴⁸ with articles of faith that demonstrated where he stood on various doctrines.⁴⁹ Another strong evidence to support Fuller's high view of Scripture is clearly demonstrated in the second and third articles. He put it this way:

II. Yet, considering the present state of mankind, I believe we needed a revelation of the mind of God, to inform us more fully of his and our own character, of his designs towards us, and will concerning us; and such a revelation I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be, without excepting any one of its books; and a perfect rule for faith and practice.

III. From this divine volume, I learn many things concerning God, which I could not have learned from the works of nature, and the same things in a more convincing light. Here I learn, especially, the infinitely amiable moral character of God. His holiness, justice, faithfulness, and goodness, are exhibited here in such a light, by his holy law and glorious gospel, as is nowhere else to be seen.⁵⁰

Fuller was careful in his reading of theological works not to admit others "ideas uncritically but he consistently evaluated them against the standard of the Bible."⁵¹ This is evidenced in a response that he sent to acknowledge a gift of books that he received from Ryland.⁵² Ryland had sent some American theological works and Fuller bristled at one of those in a letter he forwarded to Ryland. He said,

I received your parcel, containing several American publications. I have not had time to read them through, though I have looked over some of them. I did not quite like Mr. Bell's mode of appealing to the "unerring oracles of *true philosophy and the word of God*." God's Word is or is not, a sufficient rule, from whence the man of God may be thoroughly furnished. What is philosophy that it should become an "oracle," by which to try sentiments in divinity?⁵³

⁴⁸ Spencer, "Andrew Fuller and Doctrine of Revelation," 213.

⁴⁹ Brewster, *Andrew Fuller*, 49.

⁵⁰ Brewster, *Andrew Fuller*, 50.

⁵¹ Wheeler, "Eminent Spirituality," 20.

⁵² Brewster, *Andrew Fuller*, 47–48.

⁵³ Haykin, *Armies of the Lamb*, 139.

Regarding theology, Fuller was convinced that an internally consistent system was important. Yet, he was always cognizant that such consistency could not be purchased at the expense of giving due consideration to the Bible. Throughout his ministry Fuller remained a thoroughgoing biblicist.⁵⁴ He gave guidance concerning the reading of Scripture in this manner: “[Read] the Bible not with a system before your eyes, but as a little child with humility and prayer.”⁵⁵ He warned the Baptist Association of perils of theological imitation.⁵⁶ In considering some of reasons for downturn in the denomination, he wrote,

Another cause of declension, we apprehend, is *making the religion of others our standard, instead of the Word of God*. —The Word of God is the only safe rule we have to go by, either in judging what is real religion, or what exertions and services for God are incumbent upon us.⁵⁷

Fuller found the ultimate solution to any controversy in the pages of Scripture. He noted, “The sacred Scriptures contain the decisions of the Judge of all, both as things and characters, from which there is no appeal: nor is it fit there should be; seeing they are not only formed in wisdom, but perfectly accord with truth and equity.”⁵⁸

The study of Scripture was not for the purpose of just gathering theological knowledge and satisfy our curious interests. The Scriptures are meant to change us.

Fuller wrote,

There is nothing in the sacred Scriptures to gratify idle curiosity; but much that commends itself to the conscience, and that interests the heart. They are a mirror into which he that seriously looks must, in a greater or less degree, see his own likeness, and discover what kind of character he is.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Brewster, *Andrew Fuller*, 45.

⁵⁵ Haykin, *Armies of the Lamb*, 217.

⁵⁶ Brewster, *Andrew Fuller*, 46.

⁵⁷ Fuller, *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:21.

⁵⁸ Fuller, *Letters on Systematic Divinity*, 1:702.

⁵⁹ Fuller, *Letters on Systematic Divinity*, 1:701.

The examination of Scripture was to be done carefully. Fuller understood that there were hermeneutical rules that needed to be followed to properly interpret Scripture. He recognized the importance of interpreting in a manner that carefully reflected the authorial intent of the text and not the mere words of the text.⁶⁰ He wrote,

If the sacred writings be not received for the purposes for which they were professedly given, and for which they were actually appealed to by Christ and his apostles, they are in effect rejected; and those who pretend to embrace them for other purposes will themselves be found to have passed the boundaries of Christianity, and to be walking in the paths of infidelity.⁶¹

The sermons that Fuller preached and his instructions to young pastors on how to prepare sermons, also demonstrated the high view of Scripture that Fuller adhered to. Fuller encouraged young pastors to preach a chapter-by-chapter exposition of the Bible. He argued that this was critical:

In going over a book, I have frequently been struck with surprise in meeting with texts which, as they had always occurred to me, I had understood in a sense utterly foreign from what manifestly appeared to be their meaning when viewed *in connexion with their context*.⁶²

Fuller appreciated that the context of a passage had to be understood in order to have proper interpretation, and careful exposition of whole books of the Bible was a means to ensure that the interpreter was acknowledging and interpreting in light of the context. The centrality of the Word was expressed through Fuller's sermons. Each sermon would begin with a key text, as was typical of that time. The sermon was customarily constructed based on the structure of the text. His 1809 sermon from Psalm 40:6–8 is a good example of this. The sermon had the title “Jesus the True Messiah.” There were four main points and each point was drawn from a key

⁶⁰ Andrew Fuller, *Thoughts on Preaching*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:713.

⁶¹ Fuller, *Calvinist and Socinian Systems*, 2:231.

⁶² Fuller, *Thoughts on Preaching*, 1:712.

phrase in the text.⁶⁴ Since Fuller was committed to a high view of Scripture, it was his common practice to systematically expound his way through a book of the Bible in Sunday morning services.⁶⁵ He stayed faithful to this task throughout his ministry, so that before his death “he expounded a large portion of the books of the Old and New Testament.”⁶⁶

Biblical Meditation in the Personal Life of Fuller

Fuller believed that the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation was of prime importance. His high view of Scripture motivated him personally to meditate on the Bible and to instruct others to do the same. He wrote,

The sacred Scripture is a rich mine abounding with substantial treasures, but it is a mine that must be *worked*. If we would read it to advantage, it must be with *prayer* and *meditation* A blessing is pronounced upon the man *who meditates in God’s law by day and by night*.⁶⁷

Fuller recognized that what a Christian reads and thinks about will shape and mold them. For that reason, it was critical for believers to meditate on Scripture and to have our closest associations with those who followed Christ. Christ is the image of God and therefore our greatest theme for meditation. Fuller quoted his good friend Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) who put it this way:

As our minds are insensibly assimilated by the books we read, and the company we keep, so it will be in reading the book of God, and associating with his people; and as the glory of God is manifested in the highest degree in the face of Jesus Christ, this is our principle theme for our meditation.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Andrew Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:210–20.

⁶⁵ Brewster, *Andrew Fuller*, 46.

⁶⁶ A. G. Fuller, “Memoir,” 1:112.

⁶⁷ Andrew Fuller, *The Works of Andrew Fuller, in Eight Volumes* (New Haven, CT: S. Converse, 1824), 8:17–18.

⁶⁸ Fuller, *The Works of Andrew Fuller*, 7:363.

Fuller believed that biblical meditation was an indispensable spiritual discipline for one who was in ministry. He was convinced that it was necessary for every minister to ingest Scripture for spiritual nourishment if they would be successful. This was because he saw a direct correlation between personal piety and effectiveness in ministry.⁶⁹ Fuller saw two primary objectives of a preacher. They are to *enlighten* the mind and *affect* the hearts of his hearers.⁷⁰ The Holy Spirit used the preaching of the Word to accomplish these objectives. This understanding was in correlation with the Puritan and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptist understanding of human nature as being tripartite and consisting of the mind, affections and the will. To have a lasting effect preaching, and biblical meditation must first enlighten the mind, but it must also descend to the heart if it was to transform the will of the believer. For a pastor to enlighten the mind and affect the heart it was necessary that the Word do this work through the power of the Holy Spirit in his own heart first. Fuller wrote,

We must meditate on these things *as Christians*, first feeding our own souls upon them, and then imparting that which we have believed and felt to others; or, whatever good we may do to them, we shall receive none ourselves. Unless we mix faith with what we preach, as well as with what we hear, the word will not profit us.⁷¹

So, the aim of preaching was not simply to impart orthodox truths to the mind. Rather the goal was to help those people *feel* biblical truths and to appropriate them deep into the heart so that they would live out the truths. Therefore, if a pastor did not *feel* these truths through the process of his own meditation and teaching, he could not excite emulation in his hearers, since these affections are communicated through the preacher's

⁶⁹ Andrew Fuller, *The Influence of the Presence of Christ on a Minister*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:505.

⁷⁰ Andrew Fuller, *Faith in the Gospel a Necessary Prerequisite to Preaching*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:517.

⁷¹ Andrew Fuller, *Preaching Christ*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:501.

own intense love for Jesus.⁷²

Biblical meditation was the means by which the believer's mind was renewed and the means to be filled with the full presence of God. Fuller wrote, "There is no room for the fulness of God in the unrenewed mind: it is pre-occupied with other things."⁷³ To assist the Christian so that his mind was not pre-occupied but able to focus, Fuller, like the Puritans and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists, encouraged solitude. Fuller commented on Genesis 24:61–63, when Isaac was walking outside as Abraham's servant and Rebekah were approaching:

They are unexpectedly met by a person taking an evening walk. This was no other than Isaac. It may be thought that he was looking out, in hope of meeting them; but we are expressly told that his walk was for another purpose, namely, to *meditate*. He was a man of reflection and prayer; and in the cool of the evening it might be common for him to retire an hour to converse, as we would say, with himself, and with his God.⁷⁴

Fuller, again like the Puritans and seventeenth-century Particular Baptists, recommended the morning as the best time to practice biblical meditation. In his work *Reading the Scriptures* Fuller gave advice regarding when and how to engage with the Scriptures. He wrote,

In the first place, I have found it good to appoint *set times* for reading the Scriptures; and none have been so profitable as part of the season appropriated to private devotion on rising in the morning. The mind at this time is reinvigorated and unencumbered. To read a part of the Scriptures, previous to prayer, I have found to be very useful. It tends to collect the thoughts, to spiritualize the affections, and to furnish us with sentiments wherewith to plead at a throne of grace. And as reading assists prayer, so prayer assists reading. At these seasons we shall be less in danger of falling into idle speculations, and of perverting Scripture in support of hypotheses. A spiritual frame of mind, as Mr. [Samuel] Pearce somewhere observes, is as a good light in viewing a painting; it will not a little facilitate the understanding of the Scriptures. I do not mean to depreciate the labours of those who have commented on the sacred writings; but we may read expositors, and consult critics,

⁷² Andrew Fuller, *Ministers Should be Concerned not to be Despised*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:489.

⁷³ Fuller, *The Works of Andrew Fuller*, 4:128.

⁷⁴ Fuller, *The Works of Andrew Fuller*, 5:213.

while the “spirit and life” of the word utterly escape us. A tender, humble, holy frame is perhaps of more importance to our entering into the mind of the Holy Spirit than all other means united. It is thus that, by “an unction from the Holy One, we know all things.” In reading by myself, I have also felt the advantage of being able to pause, and think, as well as pray; and to inquire how far the subject is any way applicable to my case, and conduct in life.⁷⁵

Fuller in addition to recommending the morning recommended that reading and meditation on Scripture be interchanged with prayer to have the greatest spiritual benefit. Again, he followed the pattern of the Puritans and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists in this practice. The other important aspect was to prepare oneself for meditation by preparing the mind by getting into a spiritual frame. This is also like the Puritans and Calvinistic Baptists that preceded Fuller, who both spoke of the need to engage in offering repentance to God before engaging in biblical meditation.

Fuller documented many aspects of his personal piety, including his practice of biblical meditation in his personal diary. On Saturday November 13, 1784, he wrote, “Much employed in meditation, but little spirituality today.”⁷⁶ On Saturday, December 4, 1784, he wrote, “No manner of spirituality, though some freedom in meditation.”⁷⁷ On Saturday February 19, 1785, Fuller wrote in his diary, “Some tender and good feelings this morning, feel an earnest desire that my mind might be well furnished with gospel sentiments. Some meditations affording some pleasure on Revelation 1:18.”⁷⁸ Fuller wrote the following in his diary entry of Monday December 19, 1785: “Some pleasant thoughts likewise on Hebrews 2—It *became* him

⁷⁵ Andrew Fuller, *Reading the Scriptures*, in *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:788.

⁷⁶ Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, vol. 1, *The Diary of Andrew Fuller, 1780-1801*, ed. Michael D. McMullen and Timothy D. Whelan (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 89.

⁷⁷ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 94.

⁷⁸ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 110.

for who are all things &c preparative for the Lord's Supper."⁷⁹ These entries in his diary reveal that biblical meditation was a daily spiritual discipline in Fuller's life.

In his practice of biblical meditation, Fuller spent considerable time. Biblical meditation was not something that was accomplished in a few minutes. In his diary entry of Saturday, March 5, 1785, Fuller wrote, "Much employed in calls on friends. Some few hours in meditation."⁸⁰ The inference from this entry is that if Fuller had not been occupied in the pastoral visits to friends he would have spent more than a few hours in meditation.

In several candid entries, Fuller shared that the task of biblical meditation did not always prove to be profitable. His frustration and disappointment he recorded in several entries. On Saturday, June 5, 1784, Fuller wrote, "But a poor day in meditation—what a poor, barren creature I am!"⁸¹ On Saturday, February 5, 1785, he wrote, "But a poor day in meditation. Surely mine is a wretched, barren life."⁸² On Saturday, June 25, 1785, he recorded, "An uncommon load lies all day upon my spirits. Alas I am forced to read my sin in my affliction of mind. I'm incapable of all profitable meditation."⁸³ Similarly, on Saturday, June 25, 1785, Fuller wrote his diary: "But a poor day today in meditation."⁸⁴ On Saturday, October 30, 1781, he wrote, "Some pleasure today, but not much in meditation, on the love of Christ."⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 163.

⁸⁰ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 112.

⁸¹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 53.

⁸² Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 106.

⁸³ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 133.

⁸⁴ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 137.

⁸⁵ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 85.

Again on Saturday, November 6, 1784 Fuller recorded, “Some pleasure today in meditation, but not much. *O will thou not revive us again?*”⁸⁶

In his diary entries Fuller shows a pattern of spending considerable time on Saturdays in biblical meditation in preparation for preaching on the Lord’s day. On Saturday, November 27, 1784, Fuller wrote, “Some pleasure in some thoughts on the second Psalm, on *joy & trembling*.”⁸⁷ In his entry the following day he recorded, “Much tenderness and pleasure in preaching on the above subject before the Lord’s supper.”⁸⁸ He confirmed that this was his regular practice in his entry from Friday, October 15, 1784, where he recorded, “Chiefly employed today in meditation for preaching.”⁸⁹ On Saturday, March 12, 1785 he recorded, “But a poor day thinking of Isaiah 35”⁹⁰ In the next day’s entry he recorded, “Some pleasing in preaching today on God’s working in us to *will and to do* but a poor afternoon from Isaiah 35.”⁹¹ These two entries openly reveal that when Fuller struggled to meditate on the text for a message on Sunday, that the resulting message was not of the quality that he would hope for.

In his diary entries Fuller demonstrated that he practiced biblical meditation regarding a variety of passages and topics. On Saturday, June 24, 1780, Fuller wrote, “I have been thinking today of Isaiah 2:11 I have reason to be humbled, for I have so little humility: yet I think I have tasted a sweetness in that plan of redemption which strains the

⁸⁶ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 87.

⁸⁷ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 92.

⁸⁸ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 92.

⁸⁹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 82.

⁹⁰ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 114.

⁹¹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 114.

pride of all flesh.”⁹² The text he focused on reads, “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isa 2:11 KJV). Fuller in his meditation on the passage applied it to himself, as he considered that there were circumstances or causes in his life for which he needed to be humbled. This diary entry, along with several similar entries, revealed that Fuller did not simply meditate on text to prepare a message for others, but first applied it to himself. One of the topics that Fuller would spend time meditating on were characteristics of God’s law. He recorded the following in his diary entry of Saturday, October 14, 1780: “Solemn thoughts, on holiness, justness, and goodness of the law of God.”⁹³ Another topic of meditation found in his diary concerned the nature of the spiritual growth of a Christian. Fuller wrote this on Saturday, March 3, 1781, “A very affecting time, in thinking on the growth of a Christian—that those who grow most in grace, are far from thinking themselves to be eminent Christians.”⁹⁴ Fuller would contemplate key scriptural phrases and he received spiritual benefit in doing so. On Monday, April 26, 1784, he wrote, “Some fresh thoughts from “Take, eat” [Matt 26.26]—O how desirable not to be a mere *spectator* in religion!”⁹⁵

Puritan and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists had promoted biblical meditation as a way of redeeming time. Fuller made profitable use of his time by practicing biblical meditation when he travelled to various locations. In his diary entry of Saturday, November 20, 1784, he wrote,

Thought on the first Psalm in my return from Gretton for tomorrow; but how unlike am I to the character their drawn! *My leaf seems to wither* every day, and scarce anything I do seems to prosper. Feel reflections for my want of *close walk with God*.

⁹² Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 4.

⁹³ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 17.

⁹⁴ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 25.

⁹⁵ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 42.

Surely I need to renew Covenant, as it were, with God.⁹⁶

Fuller made it a practice of actively thinking about Scripture passages and especially how they apply to him, while engaging in his travel. This example reveals that as he contemplated on Psalm 1, he thought of how it applied to him and how he wanted to see change come in his life so that he might prosper in a closer walk with God. He wrote of another occasion of travel in his diary entries from Monday, February 28 to Friday, March 4, 1785: “Called at Mrs. Hobsons, with whom I have some savory conversation. Riding from there to N[orthhampto]n had some pleased exercise from 1 Peter 1:6, *if need be ye are in heaviness.*”⁹⁷

Fuller demonstrates through some of his diary entries that he would take time to meditate and pray in response to encounters with other believers and the new opportunities for learning and growth that resulted. Fuller heard about a “revival of religion” that was taking place in the lives of some in Walgrave and Guilsborough, and learned that this was connected with the intentional setting apart days for fasting and prayer. In response to this he wrote in his diary in 1791:

I was particularly affected with this though by finding it in the 67th Psalm which I was expounding about the same time—“that God being merciful to *us* & blessing *us* might be the means of his way being known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations”; at least amongst a part of them.⁹⁸

When hearing of God working a measure of revival among other believers, Fuller turns to the Scripture and meditates upon it to seek some appropriate answers and application for his context. Fuller personally looked for answers and appropriate responses through careful reflection on Scripture. Fuller was prepared to learn more about meditation and prayer from his interaction with other Christians. In his diary entry of April 20, 1785, he wrote, “Last Monday I heard a young man at Northampton speak of the advantage of

⁹⁶ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 90.

⁹⁷ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 112.

⁹⁸ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 181.

mixing prayer with reading the word. This morning I have been trying to read in that way. Read over the second chapter of Hosea in this way.”⁹⁹ Through this diary entry Fuller demonstrated that the discipline of biblical meditation combined with prayer was one that continued to grow and develop in his life.

One of the hindrances to effective biblical meditation that the Puritans and seventeenth-century Reformed Baptists documented was the problem of a mind that was carried away with worldly and idle thoughts. Fuller expressed in several places in his personal diaries his struggle to focus in order to meditate. In his entry of July 11, 1780, Fuller wrote, “The cares of the world have engrossed my attention this afternoon.”¹⁰⁰ On Saturday, August 14, 1784, Fuller wrote, “When I should be thinking on the word for the Lord’s day how ready is my mind for other things.”¹⁰¹ In a similar manner his entry on August 28, 1784, stated, “My wandering mind how it roves after things when I should be attending to the work of the Lord’s Day.”¹⁰² Again on Saturday, September 4, 1784, Fuller wrote, “Feel a great propensity to wandering of mind—seem as if I could think of almost anything but what I should.”¹⁰³ In a similar manner he wrote on September 25, 1784, “I find it hard work to bend my mind to close thought.”¹⁰⁴ On February 16, 1790, Fuller wrote, “For these last three weeks I have too much relapsed again into a state of thoughtlessness.”¹⁰⁵ In addition, Fuller put this entry in his diary that covered Monday, August 29, to Wednesday August 31: “For these two days past especially my mind has

⁹⁹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 125.

¹⁰⁰ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 8.

¹⁰¹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 67.

¹⁰² Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 71.

¹⁰³ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 73.

¹⁰⁴ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 77.

¹⁰⁵ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 179.

been wretchedly carnal. That passage has brought some conviction to me of late, ‘Are you not *carnal*, and walk as men!’”¹⁰⁶

This struggle to focus was overcome for Fuller, by exercising perseverance in efforts to practice biblical meditation. An example of this is recorded in Fuller’s diary entry for July 15, 1780: “My powers are all shackled, my thoughts contracted. Bless the Lord! I have felt a melting sense of the heinous nature of backsliding from the Lord, while thinking on Jeremiah 2:5, 31–33.”¹⁰⁷

Fuller described in many parts of his diary how biblical meditation was more than just the gathering of knowledge to contemplate with the mind. The Scriptures that Fuller pondered touched him deeply and worked powerfully on his affections. His experience of having his affections warmed follows closely the experiences of the Puritans and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists. In his diary entry of Friday, June 16, 1780, he wrote, “Felt the importance of religion, and the desire of seeing the glory of Christ, and being conformed to his image. Saw a beauty in Ecclesiastes 12:13, ‘Fear God, and keep the commandments for this is the whole of man.’”¹⁰⁸ On Thursday, June 22, 1780, Fuller in a similar manner wrote, “O that I might feel more of the power of religion, and know more of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge!”¹⁰⁹ He wrote about an encounter he experienced with God through meditation focused on Colossian 1:19: “O blessed be God, he has appeared once again. Tonight, while I prayed to him, how sweet was Colossians 1:19 to me. That which has pleased the Father pleases me. I am glad that all fullness dwells in Him.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 150.

¹⁰⁷ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 3.

¹¹⁰ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 15.

During those occasions when his mood was low, Fuller could receive benefit not just in his thinking, but a change in his affections and mood through biblical meditation.

One example of this is from his diary entry of March 30, 1781:

Much melancholy gloom today; yet some melting thoughts on the astonishing provision of divine love. Several passages seemed sweet to me—"God is willing the hearts of the proves should have strong consolation.—If any one sin, we have an Advocate with the Father."¹¹¹

As Fuller meditated on passages, he asked a variety of questions and examined a text the way someone might examine a jewel by turning it over and over in the light to see every beautiful angle. As he did this, the Scripture would ignite his affections as well as his intellect. An example of this can be found in his diary entry of Thursday, August 16, 1781. He wrote, "Serious, and somewhat pleasant. Wrote some thoughts on the holy angels taking pleasure in looking into our redemption. The end of predestination seemed sweet to me; namely, conformity to the image of God's dear Son."¹¹²

On the Lord's day, August 12, 1781, Fuller wrote this entry in his diary, "Had a sweet forenoon, in thinking on the meditation of Christ and preaching upon that subject, from Ephesians 2:13."¹¹³ This entry again demonstrates that Fuller would meditate in preparation for preaching and that he had the goal of being affected himself by the text before delivering it in a sermon. The strength of the impact on Fuller's affections was at times particularly strong. On August 11, 1781, Fuller wrote, "Have been ravished, as it were, today, in reading the account of the council held by the apostles and elders, Acts 15. Oh the beauty and simplicity of primitive Christianity!"¹¹⁴ A similar entry was recorded on Saturday, September 22, 1781:

¹¹¹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 26.

¹¹² Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 33.

¹¹³ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 33.

¹¹⁴ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 33.

My heart much moved this morning. Psalm 123:1, 2 was somewhat to me. Overcome in prayer, that God would shine upon my path. O God, thou knowest that I am willing to be any thing. It is my unfeigned desire, that not my will, but thine be done.¹¹⁵

On August 27, 1784, Fuller recorded this entry in his diary, “Some sweetness now for some days in reading over the *Acts of the Apostles*, before family prayer. Sweet times in that duty. O that we might see some such blessed times come over again!”¹¹⁶ In the entry for Tuesday, July 20, 1784, he demonstrated again how he combined biblical meditation with prayer, and how this enhanced the impact the meditation had on his affections. He wrote, “Read the 9th chapter of John this morning with pleasure—went to prayer after it with solemn pleasure.”¹¹⁷ One primary topic that Fuller focused on in meditation was divine love and the blood of Christ; Fuller wrote the following in his diary entry on the Lord’s day, July 2, 1780:

Surely, my views of myself, of divine love, and of the blood of Christ, never were clearer, nor yielded me greater satisfaction, than last night and today. Well, it has been a time of refreshment of the soul. Oh that I could retain the ideas I have had today! I thought God was such an intimately lovely being, that it was a great sin not to love him with our whole hearts. I thought one perpetual flame of supreme love was his natural due from every intelligent creature, and the want of such love merits damnation.¹¹⁸

Fuller engaged in soliloquy as part of the process of biblical meditation. This is similar to the practice of the Puritans and seventeenth-century Particular Baptists. Fuller would try and engage his own heart and soul by asking himself questions. An example of this is recorded in his diary entry of Thursday, July 12, 1781. At this time, he was considering leaving the Soham church and wanted to be sure he had pure and proper motives. He recorded the following:

Have been trying today, to examine my heart by putting myself to such questions as

¹¹⁵ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 35.

¹¹⁶ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 70.

¹¹⁷ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 64.

¹¹⁸ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 6.

these:—“Would it be most agreeable to my conscience to continue, after all, with my people?—Is it likely, in so doing, I should please God, and contribute to the welfare of his cause, on the whole?”¹¹⁹

There were times when Fuller moved away from soliloquy to engage in discussion with other believers, especially the spiritual friends he had developed. The goal was to grow together through biblical meditation and dialogue concerning how to apply the truths they were learning. Fuller recorded an example of this in his diary entry of September 30, 1785:

The best part of the day was I think in conversation. A question was put and discussed, to the following support “*To what causes in ministers may much of the want of their success be imputed?*” The answer much turned upon the want of *personal* religion—particularly the want of close dealing with God in *closet prayer*. Another reason assigned was, the want of reading and studying the Scriptures more as *Christians*, for the edification of our own souls. We are apt to study them merely to find out something to *say to others*, without living upon the truth ourselves. If we eat not the book before we deliver its contents to others, we may expect the Holy Spirit will not much accompany us. If we study the Scriptures as *Christians*, the more familiar we are with them, the more we shall feel their importance; but if otherwise our familiarity with the word will be like that of soldiers and doctors with death, it will wear away all sense of its importance from our minds.¹²⁰

This entry demonstrates that Fuller was greatly blessed by engaging in spiritual conversations to ignite personal piety among brothers in Christ. The entry also indicates how important both Fuller and his friends felt their personal practice of biblical meditation was. It was imperative that their own hearts are impacted with spiritual truth before it should be passed on through their preaching and teaching. Biblical meditation was a source of great spiritual benefit to Fuller. It was the meditation on Scripture that caused an increase in Fuller’s personal happiness and joy. On Thursday, March 29, 1781, he wrote, “Thoughts on the advocateship of Christ, from John 16:7, and 14:2, have been precious to me: and of his prophetic office, from Matthew 17:5, “This is my beloved Son—*hear him*. What a wonder I am to myself! Compared with what I deserve to be, how happy my condition; compared with what I desire to be, how

¹¹⁹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 32.

¹²⁰ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 154.

miserable!”¹²¹

Biblical meditation is what gave Fuller strength and support through the greatest trials of his life. When Fuller’s first wife Sarah was ill and suffering with a mental illness similar to dementia he found strength through contemplating Scripture. He recorded in his diary the following entry of July 25, 1792:

The afflictions in my family seem too heavy for me. I feel however some support from such Scriptures as these—All things shall work together for good &c. God, even our own God, shall bless us. It is of the Lord’s mercy that I am not consumed.¹²²

It was biblical meditation that brought peace and tranquility to Fuller’s life. Fuller testified to the reality that the means by which he was able to engage in a greater walk with God was through meditation on Scripture. For a busy period in Fuller’s life he recorded little in his diary, but this entry of Friday, July 18, 1794, indicated the powerful way God was working in him as he meditated on Scripture:

Within the last two years I have experienced perhaps as much peace and calmness of mind as at any former period. I have been enabled to walk somewhat more near to God than heretofore; and I find there is nothing that affords such preservation against sin—if we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. This passage has been of great use to me ever since I preached from it The sentiment on which I have principally discoursed was, that *Sin is not to be overcome so much by a direct or mere resistance of it, as by opposing other principles and considerations to it.* This Sentiment has been abundantly verified in my experience—So far as I have walked in the spirit, so far my life has been holy & happy—and I have experienced a good degree of these blessings compared with former times; though but a very small degree compared with what I ought to be.¹²³

The entry above is a demonstration of how Fuller took a passage like Galatians 5 and allowed it ruminate in his mind and then in his heart until eventually it resulted in a change in his life, a closer walk with God through the work of the Holy Spirit. Fuller exhorted those in his congregations as well as fellow pastors to engage in biblical

¹²¹ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 26.

¹²² Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 184.

¹²³ Fuller, *Diary of Andrew Fuller*, 186.

meditation. However, before promoting this for others, his diary entries testify that he actively practiced this spiritual discipline personally in a way that brought great spiritual benefit.

Biblical Meditation of Fuller as Described in Selected Sermons

In many of the sermons of Fuller we see the fruits of his practice of biblical meditation. Fuller in these sermons was concerned that he correctly understood and interpreted Scripture and to facilitate this he was careful to observe the larger context of the passages he preached on. In his approach to the text he would ask a variety of questions of the text so that he might ponder things like contrast, and outcomes of the passages that he was interpreting. The meaning of the text he would then include in his sermon so that he could connect with the listeners minds. Yet, it was never enough to simply understand the bare meaning of the text that he expounded. It had to affect his heart and then the hearts of those attending to his message. Finally, Fuller would spend considerable time in trying to affect the will of his hearers through careful and pointed application. This process followed the classical practice of both the Puritans and the seventeenth-century Particular Baptists as they would also expound, explain the importance of a text and then apply it to the hearts of the listeners.

Fuller gave a sermon on October 31, 1757, at the ordination of a Rev. Robert Fawkner at the location of Thorn, Bedfordshire.¹²⁴ The text was Acts 11:24, “He was good man, and full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith, and much people was added to the Lord.” This good man was Barnabas. Before expounding the verse, Fuller made a point of looking at the larger context and especially examining all the other texts where Barnabas was mentioned. He points to three characteristics that the

¹²⁴ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:135.

ordained should emulate. The three points are those that clearly arose of out the text. As Fuller meditated on the text and the meaning became clear, he formulated his sermon based immediately from what was in the text, rather than imposing his own ideas upon it. Those three points were as follows. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. It is those three points Fuller developed, ending with the concept that evangelism was particularly blessed, expressed in the phrase “and much people were added to the Lord.” Fuller made clear that it was the personal piety of Barnabas that directly contributed to the success that he had in ministry.¹²⁵ Fuller put it this way:

I think it may be laid down as a rule, which both Scripture and experience confirm, that *eminent spirituality in a minister is usually attended with eminent usefulness*. I do not mean to say our usefulness depends on our spirituality, as an effect depends on its cause; nor yet that it is always in proportion to it. God is Sovereign and frequently sees proper to convince us of it, in variously bestowing his blessing on the means of grace. But yet he is not wanting in giving encouragement to what he approves, whenever it is found. Our want of usefulness is often to be ascribed to our want of spirituality, much oftener than to our want of talents.¹²⁶

The means of grace that assist in becoming a good man, Fuller expounded in this sermon. One of these was to be active in “private retirements.” Then Fuller referred to Paul’s statement to Timothy, “Meditate on those things, give yourself wholly to them.”¹²⁷ Careful reading of the Bible and meditating upon it is critical for our personal spiritual growth, that we might be the “good man.”¹²⁸

On June 1, 1796, Fuller delivered a message entitled, “The Nature and Importance of an Intimate Knowledge of Divine Truth,” before the Baptist

¹²⁵ Wheeler, “Eminent Spirituality,” 190.

¹²⁶ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:143.

¹²⁷ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:137.

¹²⁸ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:137.

Association of St. Albans. His text was Hebrews 5:12–16.¹²⁹ Describing the Scriptures as the “oracles of God,” Fuller stated the following:

We must learn truth immediately from the oracles of God. Many religious people appear to be contented with seeing truth in the light in which some great and good man has placed it, but if ever we enter into the gospel purpose, it must be reading the word of God for ourselves, by praying and meditating upon its sacred contents. It is “in God’s light that we must see light.”¹³⁰

Fuller, in this sermon, indicated that one must receive God’s truth directly from the Word. The means by which this was to be done was by reading it for oneself, meditating on that Word and combining that meditation with prayer. That is the proper way to discover the light of God’s truth. Through sermons like this one, Fuller exhorted his hearers to engage in the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.

In a manner similar to the Puritans and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists, Fuller suggested asking various questions of the text or topic that under consideration. In this sermon he asked the question, “Would you contemplate the great *end of sin*?” He answered that question by indicating how a believer should view the topic of sin:

You must view it in its connexions, tendencies, and consequences. For a poor finite creature, whose life is but a vapour, to gratify a vicious inclination may appear trifling, but when its tendencies and mischievous consequences are taken into the account, it wears a different aspect.¹³¹

By asking these questions regarding the end or result of sin, you enhance your meditation upon the topic and begin to see it more fully. This is an example of the initial cognitive stage of meditation. Later in this sermon Fuller discusses contemplating the death of Christ and indicated that it is possible to see in it only a suffering person in Jerusalem. We need to ask questions to probe deeper and grasp

¹²⁹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:160.

¹³⁰ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:164.

¹³¹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:166.

the greater truth. Initially after Christ's death the Apostles "minds were contracted, and sorrow filled their hearts."¹³² Fuller stated further, "But when their eyes were opened to see it in its connexions and consequences, their sorrow was turned into joy."¹³³ Through asking questions like what are the particular connections or consequences of a particular topic or text, one can probe and mine the deeper truths. In this sermon, Fuller reminded his hearers to enhance continued growth in the knowledge of God and His word it was necessary to continually be in the word:

For in proportion as we love God, his word will *dwell richly in us*. It will be our bosom companion, to which we shall have recourse on every occasion, especially in season of leisure, when the mind, like a spring from which pressure is removed, rises to its natural position.¹³⁴

Fuller made clear in this sermon that a simple reading of Scripture to learn divine things was not enough. He wrote,

To be contented with a superficial acquaintance with Divine things implies also a want of affection for the things themselves Nothing is more evident than that whatever is uppermost in our affections will form the grand current of our thoughts. And where our thoughts are directed to a subject with intenseness and perseverance, it will become familiar to us, and, unless it be owing to the want of natural capacity or any other necessary means, we shall of course enter deeply into it.¹³⁵

Here Fuller makes clear that careful thought, deep meditation was necessary to understand the truth of God and this requires affection, a love for this truth. Fuller explains as well, that as believers persevere and focus deeply on a subject it will eventually reach deep within, to the affections. The end of meditation is not simply knowledge or even inflamed affections. Fuller stated further in this sermon, "The word of God is represented as *a means of sanctification*."¹³⁶ Fuller continued in the

¹³² Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:167.

¹³³ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:167.

¹³⁴ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:168.

¹³⁵ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:169.

¹³⁶ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:169.

sermon to insist that we cannot simply bypass the mind and heart to affect the will.

Biblical meditation requires that we understand first before the heart is affected and have the desires that will result in a change of our will. He stated,

Now in order that the gospel may be productive of these effects, it is necessary that it be understood. Without this, how should it interest or affect the heart? We must *believe* the truth ere it will work effectively. We must *know* it or it will not make us free. That we serve God acceptably, with godly fear, we must have *grace*: and grace is multiplied “through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord”. . . . Knowledge and affection have a mutual influence on each other. That the love of truth will prompt us to labour after more perfect acquaintance with its contents has been already observed, and that such an acquaintance will promote an increasing love of truth, in return, is equally evident. We cannot love an unknown gospel, any more than an unknown God. Affection is fed by knowledge, being thereby furnished with grounds, or reasons for its operations. By the expansion of the mind the heart is supplied with objects which fill it with delight. It is thus that it becomes enlarged, and that we feel ourselves sweetly induced to “run in the way of Divine commandments.”¹³⁷

This representation is parallel to the understanding of biblical meditation and the tripartite nature of the human soul that was written about extensively by the Puritans and practiced by them and the seventeenth-century Reformed Baptists. First, we review the Scriptures in our mind, turning the truths this way and that through a variety of questions. As we continue to contemplate the truths, they descend deeper and transform our affections so that our desires change, and we are now ready and willing to obey. Fuller continued to expound on this process by asking the question “How is it that the apostle became dead to the world by the cross of Christ? He answered: “I suppose, on much the same principle that the light of the stars is eclipsed by that of the sun It is by drinking deeply into religion that we become disaffected of carnal objects.”¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:169.

¹³⁸ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:169–70.

Fuller continued to explain in this sermon how biblical meditation has great benefit to the Christian, because the Word of God is a source of enjoyment. Fuller put it this way:

The same way in which Divine truth operates as a medium of sanctification it becomes a source of enjoyment, namely, by interesting and affecting the heart. That which, by superior lustre, eclipses the pleasures of sense, and crucifies us to the world, at the same time kindles a joy in the heart which is unspeakable and full of glory. The habitual joy which was possessed by the apostles and primitive Christians chiefly arose from a knowledge and belief of the gospel.¹³⁹

The pleasures of biblical meditation could be enjoyed at any time. Fuller knew that the Christian did not have to worry that they would not find in the Scriptures good food to meditate on because he understood that, “The Gospel is rich pasture.”¹⁴⁰

In a sermon that Fuller preached to a young minister at his ordination, *Spiritual Knowledge and Love Necessary for the Ministry*,¹⁴¹ Fuller described the main objects of ministry as follows: “You are aware that there are two main objects to be attained in the work of Christian ministry—*enlightening the minds* and *affecting the hearts* of the people.”¹⁴² Fuller was quick to add that this was only possible if the pastor was effective in this ministry. That effectiveness was dependent on whether the Scripture and the truths that he would preach touched his life first. Fuller stated in many places that the way to have the Scripture impact us was to meditate upon it. He described the importance of being affected by biblical truths this way:

If you would enlighten others you must be under their influence. If you would enlighten others you must be “a shining light” yourself. And if you would affect others, you yourself must feel, your own heart must “burn” with holy ardour. You must be “a *burning* and a *shining* light.”¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:170.

¹⁴⁰ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:478.

¹⁴¹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:478.

¹⁴² Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:479.

¹⁴³ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:479.

In order to be effective in ministry Fuller told the young pastor:

You will need also, my brother, a heart *warmed* with Divine things, or you will never be “a burning and shining light.” When we are thinking or preaching, we need to *burn*, as well as shine. When we study, we may race our brains, and form plans, but unless “our hearts burn within us,” all will be a mere skeleton—our thoughts mere bones, whatever be their number, they will be all dry—very dry, and if we do not feel what we say, our preaching will be poor dead work.¹⁴⁴

Fuller made clear that the ministry of enlightening minds and enflaming their hearts could not happen unless the preacher was first constantly feeding on the Word and having it burn to warm his affections. So, study and meditation of Scripture in Fuller’s mind was critical. At the end of his sermon to the young pastor Fuller gave this exhortation, “*Study the word of God, above all other books, and pray over it.—It is this will set our hearts on fire.*”¹⁴⁵ The way to grow in understanding the Scriptures and have it impact the heart is through biblical meditation. This is consistent and congruent with the understanding and practice of the Puritans and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists.

Another sermon that Fuller preached that touches on biblical meditation was *On an Intimate and Practical Acquaintance with the Word of God*. His text was Ezra 7:10, “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”¹⁴⁶ Fuller again stressed the importance of giving people knowledge of the Bible, but stressed that this could only be done if the pastor first possessed this knowledge himself. He put it this way:

You are to “feed the people with knowledge and understanding,” but you cannot do this without understanding yourself. Your lips are to “keep knowledge,” and the people are to “seek the law at your mouth,” but, in order to communicate it to them you must seek it at the mouth of God.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:480.

¹⁴⁵ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:481–82.

¹⁴⁶ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:483.

¹⁴⁷ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:483.

In expounding on the phrase “seek the law of the Lord,” Fuller preached: “*Seek it, brother—It will never be found without. It is a mine, in which you have to dig. And it is a precious mine, which will well repay all your labour.*”¹⁴⁸ This digging would include meditation on Scripture. Fuller insisted that this meant that a pastor needs to dig into the Word on his own, before consulting the opinions of others. So, he stated,

*Seek it at the fountain-head—You feel, I doubt not, a great esteem for many of your brethren now living, and admire the writings of some who are now no more; and you will read their productions with attention and pleasure. But whatever excellence your brethren possess, it is all borrowed, and it is mingled with error. Learn your religion from the Bible. Let that be your decisive rule. Adopt not a body of sentiments, or ever a single sentiment, solely on the authority of a man—however great, however respected. Dare to think for yourself.*¹⁴⁹

Next Fuller unpacked the phrase “prepare your heart to seek the law of the Lord.” Concerning this preparation Fuller said, “It consists in prayer, and self-examination, and meditation.”¹⁵⁰ He stated further, “Such preparation of heart is not only necessary for your *entrance* into the pastoral office, but also for your *continuance* in it. Let all your private meditations be mingled with prayer.”¹⁵¹ Fuller warned the candidate for ministry that biblical meditation and prayer should not be just for the purpose of preparing to speak to others, but that it is necessary that we feed our own soul first. He wrote, “Again, if we go to the Bible merely, or chiefly, to find something to say to the people without respect to our own souls, we shall make poor progress.”¹⁵² In a similar manner Fuller preached a sermon on Titus 2:15, and

¹⁴⁸ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:483.

¹⁴⁹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:483.

¹⁵⁰ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:484.

¹⁵¹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:484.

¹⁵² Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:484.

the phrase “Let no one despise thee.”¹⁵³ This sermon was also directed to a pastor and Fuller gives the warning:

Beware that you do not preach an unfelt gospel—If you do, it will be seen, and you will be despised. It will be seen that, though you affect to be in earnest, you do not feel; and that you scarcely believe your own doctrine. We may get into a habit of talking for the truth, and pleading for holiness, and yet be dead ourselves, and if so, we shall be sure to be despised.¹⁵⁴

In another sermon, “Ministers Fellow Labourers with God,” Fuller instructed another pastor concerning the importance of meditating to help plumb the depths of Scripture. He wrote,

A leading part of this work consists in *our becoming acquainted with the mind of God in his word*.—We must “labour in word and doctrine.” We cannot “feed the people with knowledge and with understanding,” unless we possess them. Truth is a well—full of water, but deep. A depth is there in the word of God . . . Unless we labour in this way, there can be no proper food or variety in our preaching. “Meditate on these things give thyself wholly to them.” . . . Digging in these mines is very pleasant work when we can enter into them. But there are seasons when it is otherwise; and yet we must go on, through we scarcely know how, this is *labour*.¹⁵⁵

Fuller in this exhortation to a pastor declared that the primary work of a pastor is knowing the mind of God and passing on that truth to the people. The metaphors of a deep well to plummet and a mine to dig into, imply the challenge of the task. Biblical meditation is not always easy, but it reaps great benefits and it is a necessary discipline for the soul of the pastor and so that he might have a healthy spiritual diet of truth to feed the flock under his care.

When Fuller preached on the text of 1 Timothy 4:15–16, he focused in relation to one point of the sermon on the phrase, “Take heed to thyself.” He commented on that phrase with these words: “Public religion, without that which is private and personal, is worse than no religion. We had better be anything than

¹⁵³ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:489.

¹⁵⁴ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:489–90.

¹⁵⁵ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:492.

preachers of the gospel, unless we be personally interested in it.”¹⁵⁶ Fuller in his ordination sermons continually challenged young pastors to make sure that they engaged in a vibrant private devotional life. For Fuller this was to include regular reading of Scripture and then meditation on the Word, combined with prayer.

In a sermon entitled “Affectionate Concern of a Minister for the Salvation of his Hearers,” Fuller expounded on the text of 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8. He wrote of the necessity in our study and meditation on the gospel that we examine it through the asking of a variety of questions to help unpack the full meaning. He put it this way, “Study the gospel—what it implies, what it includes, and what consequences it involves.”¹⁵⁷ This is another example of how Fuller followed the practice of the Puritans and the seventeenth-century Particular Baptists in their approach to meditation of Scripture. In this sermon, Fuller spoke about the purpose of exhorting and encouraging obedience to the Scriptures. The Bible was written with the ability to produce this by affecting the heart and changing the desires. He wrote, “The doctrines of the Scriptures, scripturally stated, are calculated to interest the heart, and to produce genuine evangelical obedience.”¹⁵⁸

The general structure of Fuller’s sermons followed the pattern of the Puritans and Calvinistic Baptists of the seventeenth century. He would begin with the exposition and explanation of a text, aimed at the human intellect. Then he would explain the doctrine that arose from the text and this was aimed at enflaming the heart. Finally, he would apply the truth to the specific context of his hearers with the desire to impact their will. An example of this can be found in a sermon entitled “The

¹⁵⁶ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:507.

¹⁵⁷ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:509.

¹⁵⁸ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:509.

Reward of a Faithful Minister,” which focused on 1 Thessalonians 2:19.¹⁵⁹ In that sermon he wrote, “In discoursing on this interesting subject, I shall endeavor to explain it—account for it—and apply it.”¹⁶⁰

In an ordination sermon addressed to both the pastor and people of a congregation, Fuller expounded on the text of Galatians 5:13, “By love serve on another.” The title of this message was “Ministers and Churches Exhorted to Serve One Another in Love.”¹⁶¹ He addressed the pastor by exhorting him to be sure that he would serve the church “*by feeding them with the word of life.*”¹⁶² He stated,

For this end you must be familiar with the word. “Meditate on these things give thyself wholly to them.” It is considered a fine thing with some to have a black coat, to loiter about all the week, and to stand up to be looked at and admired on the sabbath. But truly this is not to serve the church of God. Be concerned to be “a scribe *well instructed* in the things of the kingdom.” Be concerned to have *treasures*, and bring them forth. I would advise that one service of every sabbath consist of a well-digested exposition, that your hearers may become Bible Christians.¹⁶³

Here Fuller speaks again of the need for careful exposition, but that this exposition should be “well-digested” which implies that in the preparation the pastor has meditated thoroughly on the passage he will expound. So, biblical meditation for Fuller, was essential and beneficial first for the pastor’s own soul, and then for the benefit of those who would hear him.

Another helpful sermon to consider was entitled, “Holding Fast the Gospel.” This was an exposition of 2 Timothy 1:13, “Hold fast the form of sound

¹⁵⁹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:542.

¹⁶⁰ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:542.

¹⁶¹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:544.

¹⁶² Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:544.

¹⁶³ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:544.

words, which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”¹⁶⁴ In following the pattern of traditional Reformed preaching, Fuller was concerned to follow the grammatical-historical approach in exegeting a text of Scripture. So, he began by addressing the context. He wrote,

This Epistle was written on the near approach of death, and is very solemn. It is addressed to Timothy, and as such is doubtless especially applicable to minister, but by no means exclusively so, since all Scripture is given for the same of the church.¹⁶⁵

In a manner typical of most of Fuller’s sermons, the outline of his sermon mirrors the main points within the text. For the first part of the message Fuller than expounded the meaning of the text, looking specifically at the meaning of the words. He explained what is meant by “sound words” and then the “form” of sound words. He explains that the word “form” indicates that,

It was only outline, only a sketch, for Timothy and all other Christians to fill up, and meditate upon. Paul did not know all. Angels do not. It will require eternity to know all. There is plenty of room for meditation, only let us keep within the lines which the apostles have sketched out.¹⁶⁶

In the above statement Fuller again explains that Scripture is something that ministers, and all Christians should regularly meditate upon, and that the Scriptures provide a lifetime of material to engage. What the apostles have provided is the framework within which to meditate, the basic truths and theological tenets that form the outer fences of a spiritual garden, where we may taste all the produce through biblical meditation, while remaining within safe boundaries.

Fuller examines the words “hold fast” next and to explain the text more completely, he gives examples of “contrast.” He cites several examples of those who

¹⁶⁴ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:547.

¹⁶⁵ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:547.

¹⁶⁶ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:548.

for various reasons do not hold fast to sound words. By employing the use of contrast, Fuller was able to unpack the text further to those who would hear him.

Fuller expounded the phrase “in *faith and love*” next. Here he explained the necessity of genuine faith that will be demonstrated in affection for the truth. He wrote,

There is such a thing as a bigoted and blind attachment to doctrines, which will be of no use, even if they be true. The word does not profit, unless it be “mixed with faith.” And there is such a thing as a sound creed, without charity, or love to God and men. But the gospel must be held in faith and love. The union of genuine orthodoxy and affection constitutes true religion.¹⁶⁷

Fuller in this sermon explained the text to engage the intellect and then he explained the importance of the truths in order to warm the heart. In the final section of this message Fuller presented several points of application in order to affect the will and exhort his hearers to an obedience response. He asked his hearers to consider the great value of the “sound words.” Then, he reminded them how they are the only words that can meet the needs of “perishing sinners.” He stated next “they are the *only source of a holy life*.”¹⁶⁸ Finally, he explained that these sound words are “the *only source of real happiness*.”¹⁶⁹ All these points of application were to encourage his hearers to engage in the word and to hold fast to the “sound words” of Scripture.

Biblical meditation was a spiritual discipline that was of preeminent importance in the life of Fuller. His high view of Scripture created the need to engage the Bible with diligence to understand it as deeply as possible. Fuller followed the pattern of biblical meditation that Puritans and Calvinistic Baptists of the seventeenth century employed. He began by examining the context of a passage, the grammar and meaning of words with the goal of understanding the text. Fuller would then ask

¹⁶⁷ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:548–49.

¹⁶⁸ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:549.

¹⁶⁹ Fuller, *Sermons and Sketches*, 1:549.

questions of the text to probe deeper, followed by asking himself questions so that he might awaken and ignite his affections. Finally, Fuller would consider in very practical terms, the proper responses to the truths of the text, so that he might be obedient to the Word of God. The commitment that Fuller had to this process of biblical meditation is evident in the personal record of his diary and in many of his sermons. For Fuller, the Christian and lay person alike, must understand the Word, so that their heart might be warmed in a deeper love for Christ, resulting in a joyful and willing obedience. The spiritual discipline that gave considerable facilitation towards this was biblical meditation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary

Christians who desire to enter into a deeper and richer relationship with God can find help if they will engage in the practice of biblical meditation. This thesis began by presenting the problem of modern-day evangelicals who try to connect with God in ways that circumvent Scripture. The second chapter was an analysis of the biblical and theological foundation for the practice of biblical meditation. The third chapter was an overview of the Puritan and Calvinist Baptist understanding and practice of biblical meditation. It was the Puritans and Calvinist Baptists of the seventeenth-century that informed the theology and practice of Andrew Fuller. Chapter 4 examined biblical meditation in the life of Andrew Fuller with a focus on his personal practice as evidenced through his diaries. Then an examination of biblical meditation in Fuller's ministry life was considered through an examination of several of his sermons.

Looking Back: The Blessing of Tradition

Christians desire to worship with delight the Triune God in a deep and personal way. In an effort to both calm their anxious spirits and engage God in a deeper way, contemporary evangelicals have meandered down a variety of crooked paths. Some have looked for answers within themselves, hoping to hear a voice from God. While others have looked to the East, blending some eastern meditation and spirituality with more classical Christian spiritual disciplines.

The recommendation of this thesis is to look to the past; there is rich tradition of Reformed spiritual writings among Puritans and Calvinistic Baptists like Andrew Fuller. To look at Christian authors from a previous era is to gain the significant advantage of seeing different perspectives on the spiritual issues that concern believers today. One of the most profitable ways to liberate oneself from the fixation and myopia of their own age is to discover how Christians of other ages thought about and practiced their Christianity. Peter Adam put it this way: “Study of these writings will help Evangelical believers of today make the most of their heritage, and also means that they will not have to adopt the spiritual practices of other traditions to fill in an imagined gap in their own.”¹

By looking into the past, Christians can rediscover the pathway to a deep and meaningful walk with the Lord. As believers gaze into the past and consider the piety of their predecessors they will find rising to the top of the ladder of spiritual practices is the deeply beneficial discipline of biblical meditation.

Implementation in the Local Church

There are numerous ways that biblical meditation can be encouraged and developed in the local church. The place to begin is with the leadership. Pastors and elders should model this practice in their own lives. The vision and strategy of a gospel-centered church should involve the communication of the centrality of Scripture and the critical need for each believer to personally read and meditate on Scripture. Pastors should model this by personally developing the practice of biblical meditation in their own lives and then mentoring the elders of the church. This means a commitment to the Word, not just in theological words and statements, but in everyday practice. The pastors and elders of a local church must follow the example

¹ Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, ed. D. A. Carson, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 202.

of Fuller, who said, “Lord, thou hast given me a determination to take up no principle at second hand; but to search for everything at the pure fountain of thy word.”²

Practically this means, that the leadership must learn to study and meditate on the Word before consulting commentaries, devotional books, or listening to the many podcasts available to the contemporary church. The reading of some Puritan devotional literature as well as the diary of Andrew Fuller and some of his sermons would serve as a further catalyst to encourage the pastors and elders to engage in biblical meditation themselves.

The elders and pastoral leadership together can mentor and train the rest of the congregation through a variety of means. The contemporary local church would do well to rediscover the model of family worship that was fastidiously practiced by Puritans and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists. Fathers and mothers should be encouraged to lead their families in times of Bible reading, followed by meditation with careful application. Pastors and elders can be involved in encouraging families by providing times of training in inductive bible study that involves focused thought that looks to warm the heart and motivate the will to specific steps of application. Training sessions can be provided and followed up with some home visitation to evaluate and encourage how each family is engaging in biblical meditation as a part of their family worship.

Many local churches have smaller groups of people who meet during the week. The leaders of these groups can be trained and mentored in the practice of biblical meditation. That training can be carried out by the pastors and elders of the church. Each small group person can discuss with the rest of their group the passages they have read and meditated on and the leaders and other participants can provide

² Andrew Fuller, *Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller, With A Memoir of his life by the Rev. Andrew Gunton Fuller* (1845; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 1:20.

direction and mutual encouragement. This collective effort could provide significant help to motivate and encourage believers in the local church to make biblical meditation a personal practice and as a key spiritual discipline that they should engage in daily.

In addition to the involvement in small groups, is the practice of spiritual friendships. This was something that Fuller engaged in throughout his ministry. Small group leaders could encourage each member of a small group to have one spiritual friend that they would communicate with at least once weekly. Part of this weekly check in would be to discuss their personal practice of biblical meditation. Specifically, they would discuss the Scripture passages on which they have meditated, asking each other questions about what they have learned and what steps or plans of application they will implement as are result of their biblical meditation.

Many have been aided in the practice of biblical meditation by enjoying the outdoors. Church leadership could encourage people to take walks in quiet areas where they can spend time focusing their thoughts on passages that they have read. In the spiritual friendships that people engage in, a weekly practice could involve a “walk and talk,”—that is, a time when two spiritual friends go for a walk as they dialogue about the text of Scripture they have meditated on.

It would be helpful for pastors and elders to recommend ways in which people can find time to do biblical meditation in their busy schedules. For those who have long commutes to work, they might be encouraged to read a section of scripture before they begin their commute and then mull it over in their minds on the way to their place of employment. Those how have tasks to do throughout a day that do not require mental thought and focus could be directed to redeem this time by meditating on Scripture as they perform these tasks. Examples of such tasks are yard work, like lawn mowing, trimming, gardening, snow clearing or shoveling and other similar tasks. Before engaging in such a task, the believer could be encouraged to read over

the passage of Scripture they wish to meditate on and then give their thoughtful attention to it as they do their tasks.

All devout believers want to follow the admonition of the Apostle Peter from 2 Peter: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18 NAS). To actively pursue this spiritual growth, Christians cannot develop their own personal spirituality. They should not look to the East, and adopt their forms of meditation, nor should they look to New Age spirituality or within themselves. The Scriptures provide everything needed for spiritual maturity and the joy of growing on in the knowledge and worship of God. The way forward is to look back into the rich tradition received from the Puritans and the Calvinistic Baptists like Andrew Fuller. As people look back they can follow the example of those who went before and learn to daily meditate on the Bible, so that they might grow in knowledge and love for God and have the joy of a deeper walk with Him.

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ABSTRACT

THINK ON THE WORD: BIBLICAL MEDITATION IN THE LIFE OF ANDREW FULLER (1754–1815) AND THE TRADITION IN WHICH HE STOOD

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This thesis presents biblical meditation as an important spiritual discipline to be engaged in by devout Christians, rather than other forms of spirituality that look beyond the Scriptures. The purpose of this thesis is to show that biblical meditation is a practice encouraged in Scripture and to encourage believers to look to the past and the rich tradition of those who have gone before. Specifically, this means looking at the tradition of the Puritans and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists who in both theology and practice informed Andrew Fuller. The thesis then presents the personal life and ministry of Fuller as an example that contemporary believers can follow. The thesis seeks to show that there is a rich heritage of biblical meditation to which contemporary believers can look to enhance their walk with God today.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the topic, presenting the need in view of contemporary Christians engaging in spirituality that bypasses Scripture. Chapter 2 exemplifies biblical meditation as it is presented in the Old and New Testament. Through the exegesis of pertinent Old and New Testament passages a biblical and theological foundation for the practice of biblical meditation is established. Chapter 3 examines the Puritan and seventeenth-century Calvinistic Baptists and their practice of biblical meditation. This presents the practice and tradition that influenced Fuller.

Chapter 4 explores a biblical meditation in Fuller's personal life, as expressed through his diaries and his ministry life as found his sermons. Chapter 5 presents the importance of looking to the past to escape the confines of the present and to learn the spiritual discipline of biblical meditation.

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